BOOM TIMES

CHRIS (BOOMER) BERMAN
A LOOK BACK-BACK-BACK
BY CHARLES P. PIERCE

Sports Illustrated

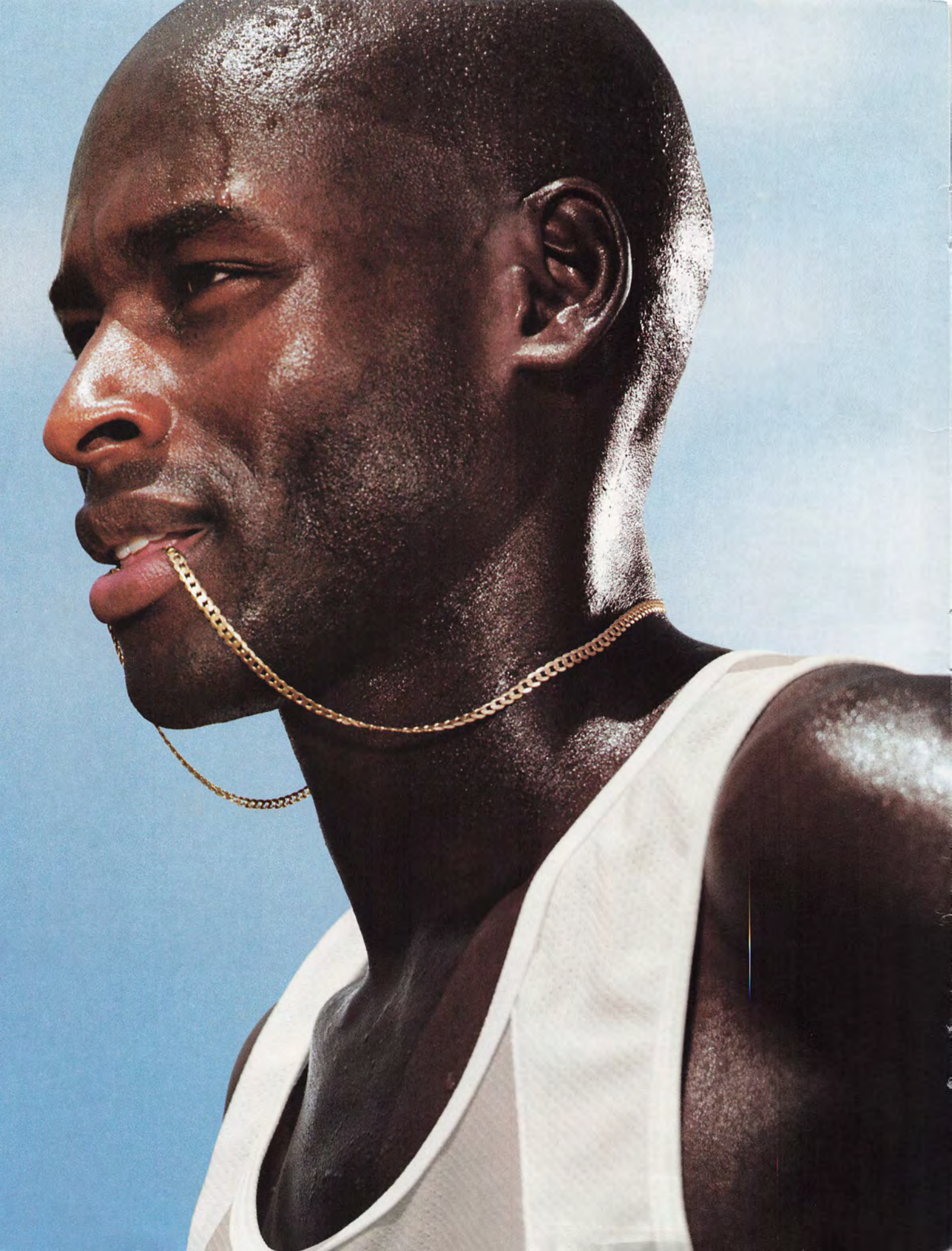
GOLDEN GIRL

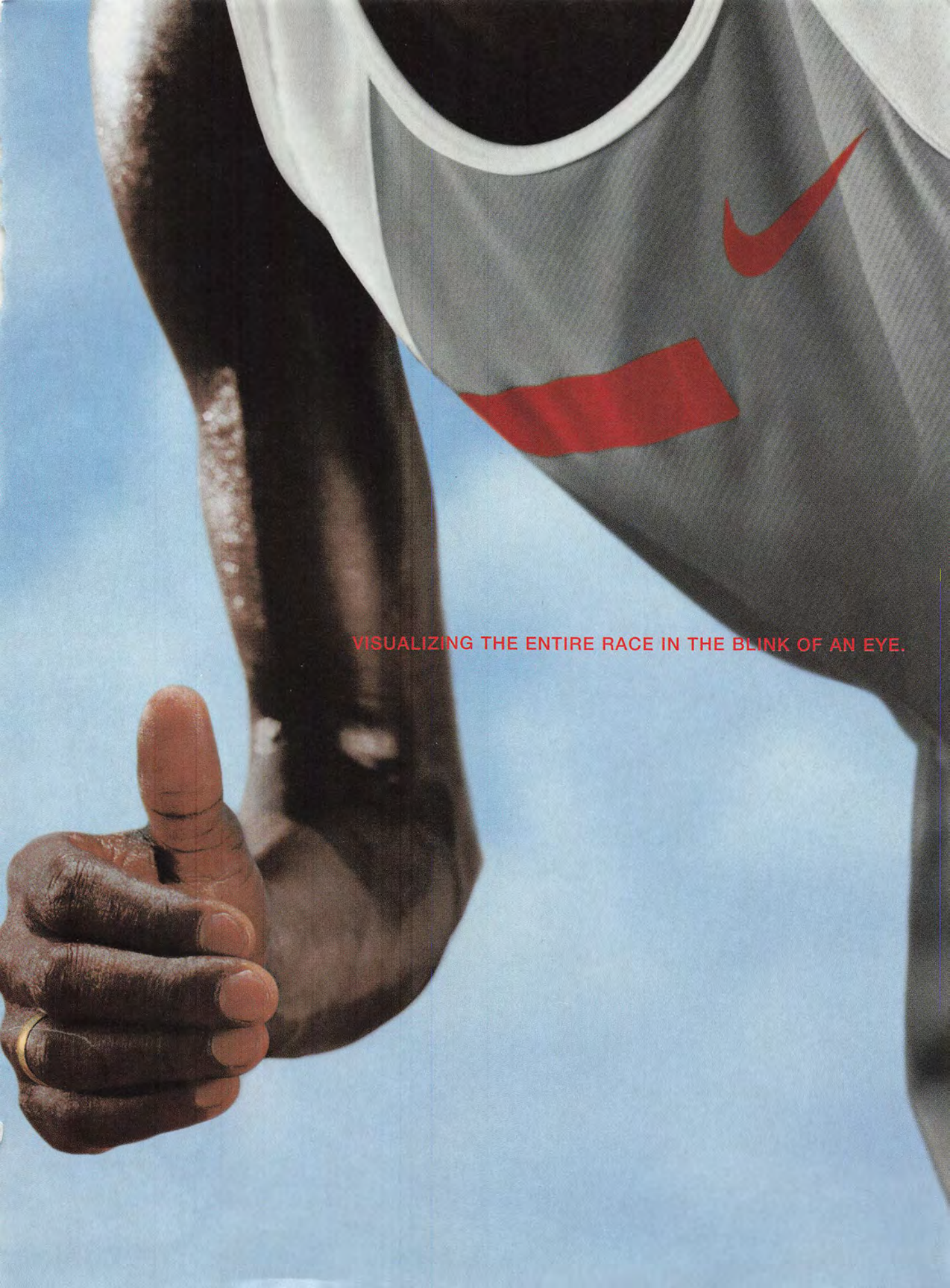
Natalie Coughlin

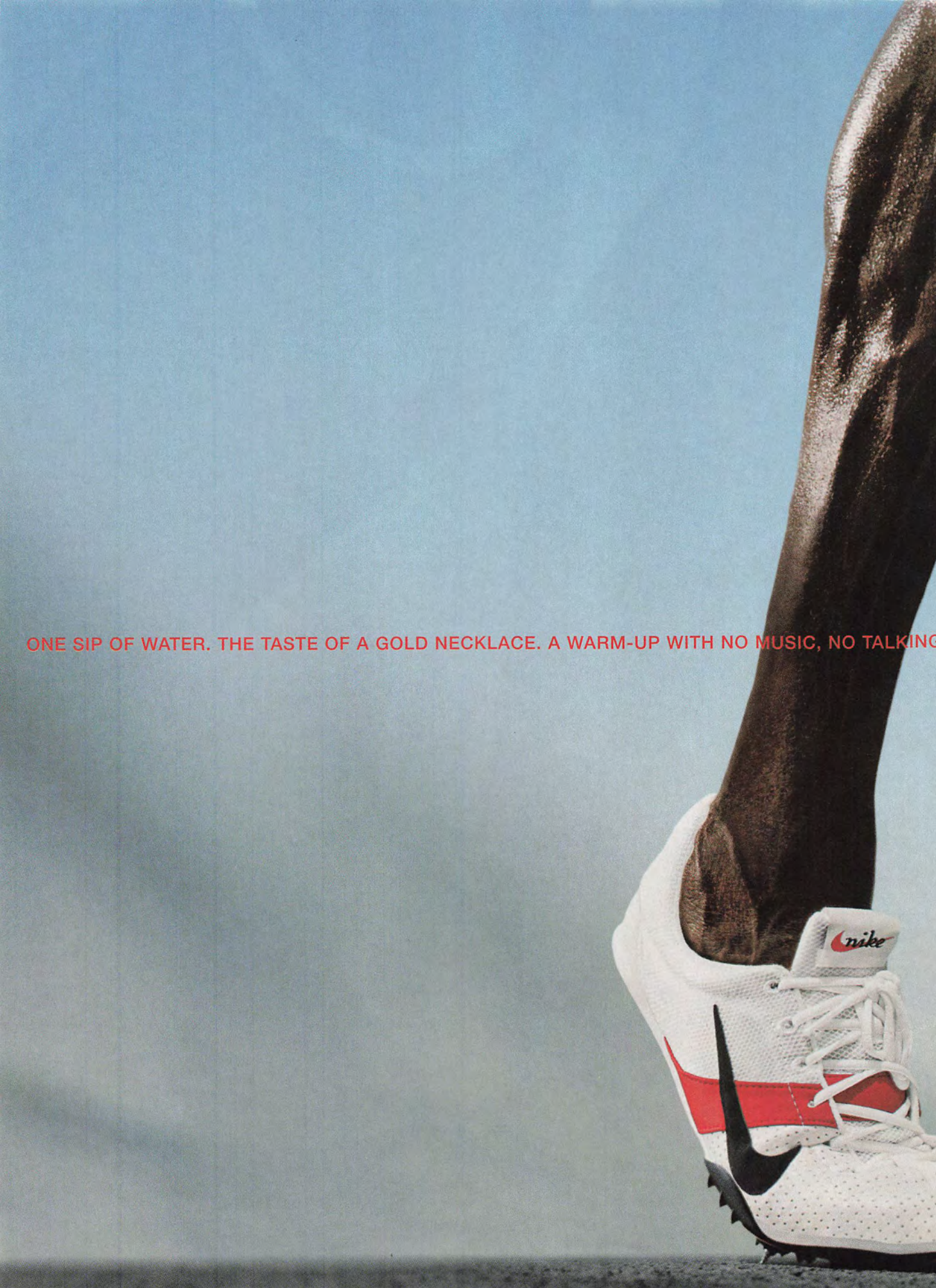
OLYMPICS

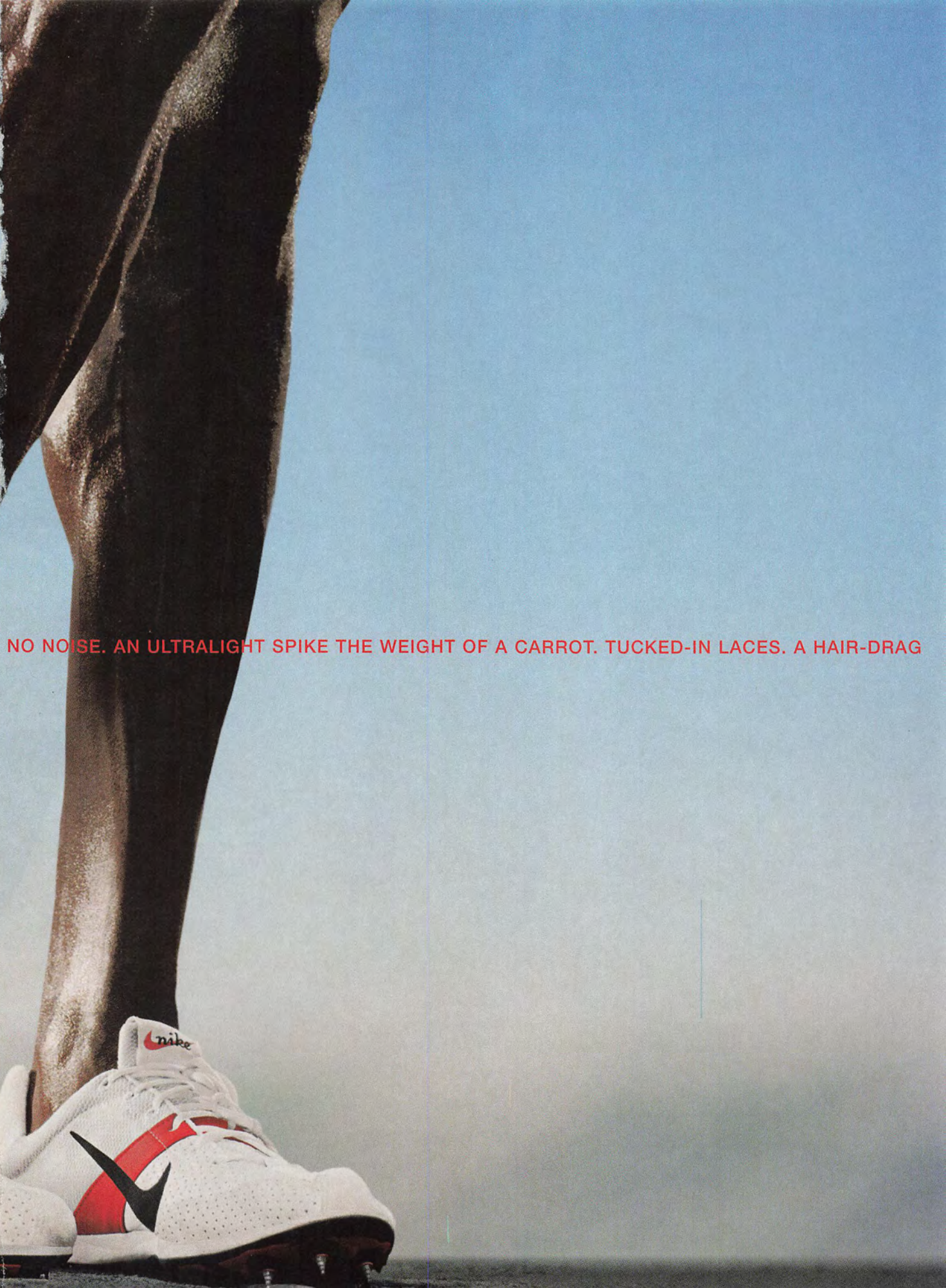
Medal Man

How Many Records Can **MICHAEL PHELPS** Break?




VISUALIZING THE ENTIRE RACE IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.


ONE SIP OF WATER. THE TASTE OF A GOLD NECKLACE. A WARM-UP WITH NO MUSIC, NO TALKING
nike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Sports Illustrated
August 23, 2004
VOLUME 101, NO. 7

The Lineup

DEPARTMENTS...

10 **Leading Off**
20 **Contributors**
22 **Letters**
Hail the conquering Lance!
25 **Air and Space**
Eating gyros can make you feel like a hero **by Steve Rushin**
26 **Scorecard**
- The Great Pigskin Debate
- Roenick's gambling ties
- Ivan Lendl, caddie
- Julia Child, Red Sox fan

38 **Faces in the Crowd**
110 **The Life of Reilly**
This Olympic torch song was a little off-key **by Rick Reilly**

INSIDE...

105 **The NFL**
- Dayne's Giant wait is over

107 **Baseball**
- Young Indians on the rise
- B.J. Upton: MLB's LeBron
- Is Martinez Hall-bound?

COVER

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEINZ KLUETMEIER
INSETS: ESPN (BERMAN);
PIERRE-PHILLIPE MARCOU/GETTY IMAGES (COUGHLIN)

SI EXTRA

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SI.com
For more from the Athens Olympics, including schedules, a medal tracker and insider columns from SI writers, go to **si.com/Olympics.**

2004 Olympics

46 **Water Craft**
Michael Phelps has medals aplenty, gold and otherwise
by Tim Layden

52 **Hi-Ho Silver!**
U.S. gymnasts win first men's team medal in 20 years
by E.M. Swift

56 **Bad Dream**
Welcome to U.S. basketball's Olympic nightmare
by Jack McCallum

64 **American Graffiti**
Restraint's the key if the U.S. wants new friends in Athens
by S.L. Price

UPHOLDING Paul Hamm hangs tough.

Plus
- Rowing (page 50)
- Water Polo (page 51)
- Beach Volleyball (page 54)
- Softball (page 59)
- Synchronized Diving (page 60)
- Iraqi Soccer (page 63)

GOLF

70 **Straits to the Top**
V.J. Singh's PGA victory proved that he's the world's best player
by Alan Shipnuck

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

78 **Little but Unbeatable**
De La Salle High has won 151 consecutive football games
by Kelley King

TELEVISION

86 **Boom Times**
Back-back-back through 25 years with Chris Berman
by Charles P. Pierce

WHISTLE-STOP Singh scored another major win in Wisconsin.

BILL FRAKES; ROBERT BECK (SINGH)

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and two issues combined in July and at year end, by Time Inc. Principal Office: Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1393. Ann Moore, Chairman, CEO; Richard Atkinson, Executive Vice President. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada Addresses to: Postal Stn A, PO Box 4322, Toronto, ON, M5W 3G9. GST #122781974RT. U.S. subscription: $89.04 for 56 issues. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, Post Office Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2004 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC. Printed in the U.S.A.

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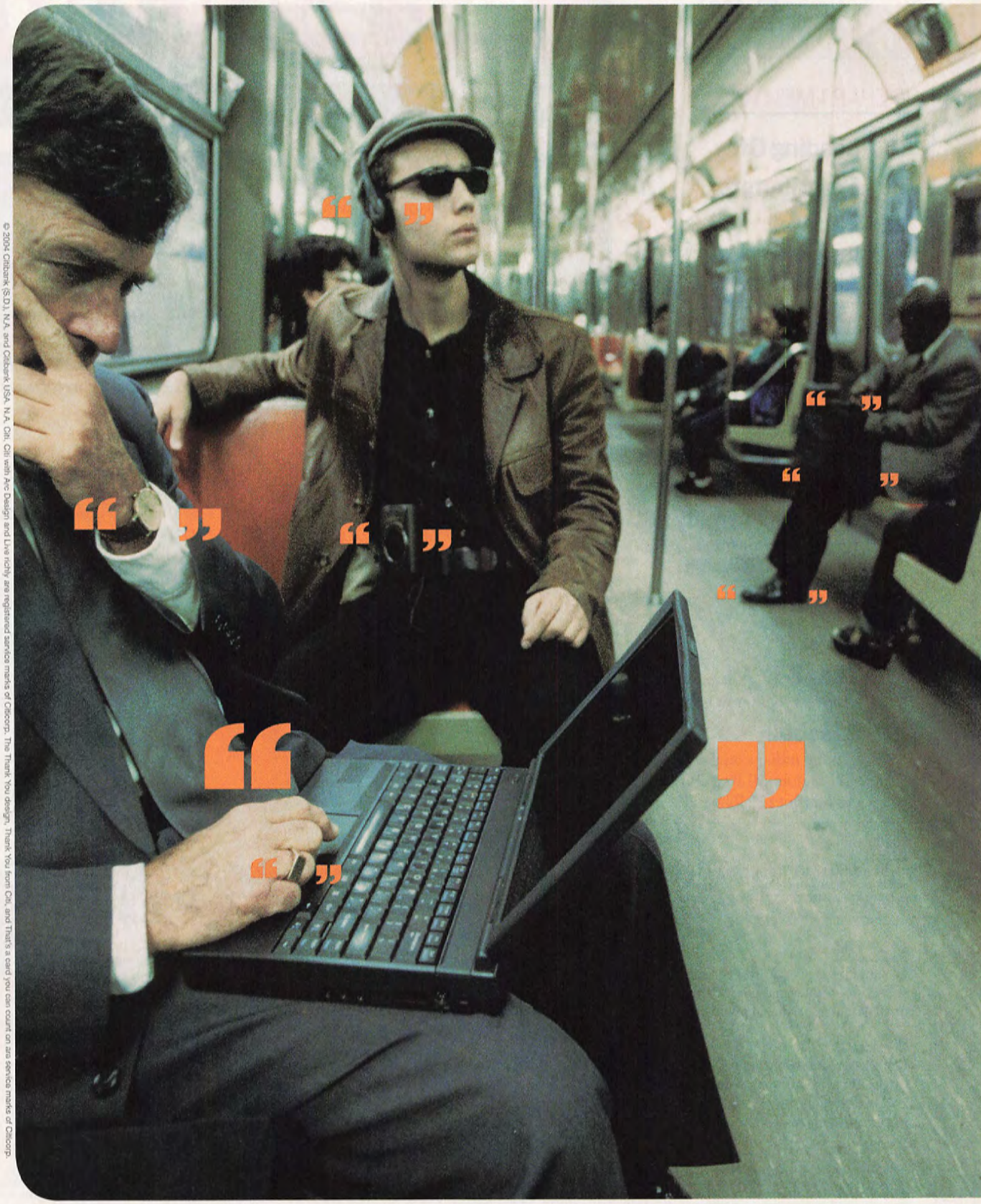

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Leading Off

Grand Opening

THE OLYMPIC STADIUM in Athens was sold out for the opening ceremonies last Friday (page 46), but there were plenty of seats available just outside its gates (inset)—and at most of the Games' venues.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN W. McDONOUGH; LYNN JOHNSON (INSET)

Sports Illustrated

2004 Olympics

Leading Off

127

Leading Off

Cyclopolis

LEVI LEIPHEIMER OF the U.S. could not endure the 104° heat on Saturday and had to drop out of the 139-mile men's cycling race through the streets of Athens, which was won by Italy's Paolo Bettini. On Sunday archers let fly in Panathinaiko Stadium (inset).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB MARTIN

PHELPS
speedo fedd7

Leading Off

Butterfly Effect

MICHAEL PHELPS set a world record in the 400-meter individual medley final last Saturday to claim the first of what he hoped would be eight gold medals in Athens; that quest was derailed the next day, when South Africa set a world record in winning the 4×100-meter freestyle relay, in which Phelps and his U.S. teammates took the bronze.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEINZ KLUETMEIER

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Old School Playground.

New School Game.

WHO IS THE GREATEST
Sports Illustrated
SPORTSMAN of the YEAR

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You Get the Picture

AS THE OLYMPICS opened in Athens last week, SI's 46-member Games crew fanned out over the baking Greek landscape. "With more than 20 sports going on at once and news breaking all the time, it's almost impossible to keep up with everything," says assistant managing editor Craig Neff, who is overseeing the magazine's Athens coverage. "Fortunately we have a team of Olympic veterans who thrive in the 2½ weeks of craziness."

VIEW FROM OLYMPUS Simon Bruty, and nine other SI photographers, hit the ground shooting.

SI's office at the warehouselike press center operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with 11 writers and 10 photographers who work for the magazine and our SI.com website filtering through at all hours. Director of photography Steve Fine's corner is decked out with maps, schedules and a whiteboard on which assignments are scrawled. Fine, a veteran of nine Olympics, and five other photo editors spend part of their 18-hour shifts culling the best shots from the more than 30,000 digital photos taken each day for SI. "None of these pictures is an accident," says Fine, who scouted Athens venues and locations for two years before the Games. "We're trying to make iconic images that convey a sense of place and a moment in history."

Steve Fine

To ensure the technical quality of each image, SI imaging director Geoffrey Michaud puts the photos through the digital equivalent of a darkroom session before transmitting them back to New York. As he did in Sydney in 2000 and Salt Lake City in 2002, Michaud is using a new generation of technology that will most likely become part of SI's regular operations after the Games. "This is an opportunity to pressure-test," he says. "In this environment you find out quickly if anything needs to be fixed."

Geoffrey A. Michaud

Something always needs to be fixed at the Olympics, and senior editor Richard Demak is the magazine's on-the-scene problem solver. Last week, for example, photographer Lynn Johnson's credential blew off while she was scouting shooting locations on a motorcycle; in a few hours Demak had arranged for a new one. "The thing about the Olympics is that 99 percent of the problems can't be anticipated," says Demak, who has worked five previous Games for SI, summer and winter, beginning with Seoul in 1988. "I'm just glad it was the credential—and not Lynn—that flew off the motorcycle." □

BILL FRAKES (TOP); MEL LEVINE (FINE)

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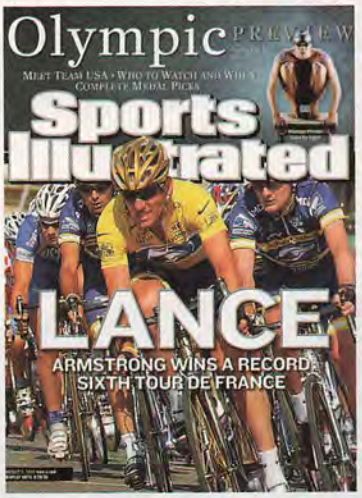
Covering Lance

I was very surprised and disappointed, when I received SI in the mail yesterday, to discover that Lance Armstrong was not the focus of the cover (Aug. 2). What does a guy have to do? Inside I discovered that as a subscriber I had received a special Olympics cover, while newsstands were selling a cover of Lance. A preview of the Olympics inside the magazine is fine, but to put in on the cover instead of a man who just won a record sixth straight Tour de France is pathetic.

Beth Riggs
Woodland, Calif.


Olympic PREVIEW
Meet Team USA • Who to Watch and Who's Complete Medal Picks
Sports Illustrated
LANCE
ARMSTRONG WINS A RECORD SIXTH TOUR DE FRANCE

On the 35th anniversary of Neil Armstrong's historic step on the moon, Lance's sixth straight victory in France cements his name in sports history (*The Joy of Six*, Aug. 2). *Vive L'ance!*

Brian L. Buckley
Cashiers, N.C.

Obstacles That Lance Overcame to Win: 10) a divorce; 9) an accusatory book; 8) rivals Jan Ullrich, Iban Mayo, Ivan Basso and Tyler Hamilton; 7) L'Alpe d'Huez; 6) spitting, booing, cursing, beer-throwing fans; 5) Greg LeMond's negative comments; 4) hotel room searches; 3) Filippo Simeoni's lawsuit; 2) cancer; 1) the SI cover jinx (June 28).

Ilene Winters, Monmouth Beach, N.J.

In a single page, Rick Reilly captured the drama of the Tour—that it is not simply Lance versus the other riders (THE LIFE OF REILLY, Aug 2). It's Lance against 101 years of ghosts. It's Lance against a world culture that cannot reconcile its love-hate relationship with America. It's Lance versus journalists who refuse to recognize the evolution of a hero right before their eyes.

Eric Goodwin, Chicago

Armstrong's reply when asked if he will compete in another Tour de France should be, "Only if it's not held in France."

Ron Myers, Rockport, Texas

Class Picture

Over the years SI has printed many great photographs, but I can't remember one that I enjoyed more than the photo of 52 Hall of Famers (INSIDE THE WEEK IN SPORTS, Aug. 2). It was fun going through the names and remembering whom I had seen play. Too bad that Hank Aaron, Luis Aparicio, Al Lopez, Stan Musial, Frank Robinson, Nolan Ryan, Mike Schmidt and Carl Yastrzemski couldn't be there.

Jack Sheppard, Westerville, Ohio

A fan of the game is forced to stop and examine each face, which evokes 30- or 40-year-old memories of games and companions. There is Koufax, Maz, Killebrew and Brock. And there is Whitey Ford holding up a glass, perhaps toasting his absent teammate and friend Mickey Mantle.

Mark Rosenberg, Boca Raton, Fla.

The Big O

I wish I could come up with a more descriptive word, but when looking at your OLYMPIC PREVIEW issue (Aug. 2)—particularly Julia Morrill's 16-page *Meet Team USA*—all I can say is, Wow. The photographs, especially the sepia-toned images and the picture of the swimmers titled "Pool Sharks," were spectacular, and the amount of information presented was impressive. I hope your coverage during the Games is just as riveting.

Kristin Ingwell Goode, Lexington, Ky.

I have an interest in our women's softball team after catching Cat Osterman's act as she mowed down batters for Texas in last year's College World Series. She is a remarkable athlete, one of the two college players suiting up for our team, and I was disappointed that she was not listed as one of our "aces" even though she led the team in wins and ERA—it's hard to do better than her 0.00—during the team's pre-Olympic exhibition tour. How about some props for the new kid?

Steve Scott, Signal Hill, Calif.

Voter Error

Which presidential candidate is the better athlete (SCORECARD, Aug. 2)? The 58% of your on-line voters who chose George W. Bush must be kidding. John Kerry plays hockey, skis, windsurfs and snowboards. The man rides a Harley, for crying out loud. Bush waved pom-poms in college and then went on to be the managing general partner of the Texas Rangers. Now he fishes.

John D. Pence Jr.
Washington, D.C.

Agony of the Feet

Vasili Alexeyev (CATCHING UP WITH, Aug. 2) was the source of one of my family's favorite stories. One day as we were watching a weightlifting competition on TV, Alexeyev stepped onto the floor to attempt a prodigious lift, and my son, then about four, said, "Look, Mom, there's Human Drama!" It took a minute, but we finally realized that every week when Jim McKay introduced *ABC's Wide World of Sports*, he spoke of "the human drama of athletic competition" just as Alexeyev's image appeared on the screen. We still laugh at the memory and often wondered what happened to Human Drama. Thanks for the update.

Carla Stewart, Framingham, Mass.

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or was they scared of you?

BUZZ ALDRIN:
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encountering any living being whatsoever.

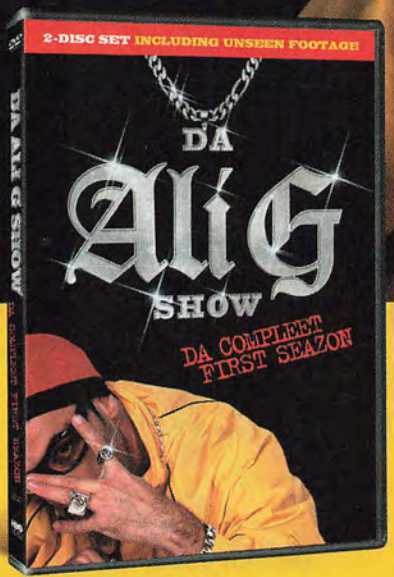
ALI G:
Do you think man will ever walk on the sun?

BUZZ ALDRIN:
No. The sun is too hot. It is not a good place to go to.

ALI G:
What happens if they went in winter,
when the sun is cold?

BUZZ ALDRIN:
The sun is not cold in the winter.

Ali G meets Buzz Aldrin.
Episode 4.
Da Ali G Show



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Eat a Gyro, Be a Hero

BOB MARTIN

by Steve Rushin

ATHENS DOESN'T have to be terrorized to be terrifying. Signs on most toilets—at the airport, in hotels, at the Olympic Stadium—warn, DO NOT FLUSH PAPER. (And you think wondering where to put your gum is stressful.) Drivers treat stop signs as an invitation to accelerate. ("Isn't this a one-way street?" you ask a cabbie as he flies against the painted arrow, and he barks back, "Eez one way. *My* way!") Every other sign in the city is unreadable, at least to an American, whose rudimentary acquaintance with Greek is limited to a few unhelpful fragments: Alpha-Bits, Delta Burke, Catherine Zeta-Jones.

As the Olympics arrived, Athens *was*—as many feared it would be—a smoldering ruin. But the plume came from the 44.9% of Greeks over age 15 who smoke, the highest rate in the European Union. (You half expected the Olympic flame, at the end of the Opening Ceremonies, to be lit by a single cigarette butt, casually flicked into the cauldron.)

And the ruins, in their defense, *are* the most beautiful on Earth, which is why, late on any given weeknight during the Olympics, you'll find 150 or so people unwinding on the Acropolis. From way up there, Athens becomes a layer cake of lights: The stars twinkling above, city lights winking back below and, in between, the glowing constellation of ten dozen lit cigarettes.

So: smoke, ruins, terror? Yes. But terrorism? Those fears diminish even before arrival—while flying in from Frankfurt, with half the German Olympic team—when you notice that all the life vests on Lufthansa are jauntily labeled SCHWIMMWESTE (swimming vest), as if a crash into the Mediterranean might be a welcome recreational diversion for these impossibly healthy Teutons: a chance to indulge in a bracing backstroke.

And anyway, Olympic visitors ought to feel secure, as Greece has spent, famously, more than $1 billion on . . . security. Though the security guards who refused, for the better part of an hour, to let spectators *out* of the Olympic Stadium on Friday night seemed to have momentarily lost the plot. But $1.5 billion worth of security aside, Athenians aren't easily frightened under any circumstances. Which may be why there are at least two of them on every speeding motorcycle. Little surprise that the alibi concocted for sprinters Konstantinos Kenteris and Katerina Thanou—Greece's greatest Olympians, who skipped their mandatory drug test in Athens last week—was a mysterious and unwitnessed tandem motorcycle crash, involving no other vehicles. But these tandem motorcycles are everywhere, abruptly appearing around corners, scattering pedestrians like pigeons. Beware of Greeks sharing lifts.

Still, the notion that the nation's two most celebrated athletes, after missing their drug test, sustained minor injuries on the same motorcycle and had to be hospitalized—quarantined from the media—set a new standard in Olympic silliness. Citius, altius, ludicrous.

But the Greeks are sticking to their story. It's an oddly endearing quality, this denial of the obvious. Directed by a Greek volunteer down a dirt path outside the Olympic Stadium, a smartly dressed woman asked, "Do we have to walk on the dirt?" To which the volunteer replied, with wounded national pride, "That's not dirt." He pointed to the brown, granular, dusty substance found on American ballpark base paths and added, "That's compressed tarmac." *Riiight.* And all Greek buses are unwinged jets, conveying passengers to Candy Land.

All of which is to say that the only terrors experienced by ticket holders on the Olympics' opening weekend were relatively happy, minor ones. At a concession stand (or bus stop or takeaway souvlaki stall) attracting the citizens of a dozen Non-Queuing Nations, a lack of line discipline turns the smallest transaction—boarding a tram, buying a hot dog—into what resembles a bidding frenzy at the Bulgarian Board of Trade. Sartre wrote, "Hell is other people," and, as a Kyrgyzstani sportswriter attempts to filch your Opening Ceremonies souvenir press packet, you are tempted to modify that slightly: Hellas other people.

> We courageous tourists in Athens felt good about ourselves, braving beach volleyball by day, sipping ouzo by night.

But then, after passing an evening in a sidewalk café—"You want a view of the Thing?" sighs a weary hostess, seating you beneath the 2,481-year-old Parthenon—your only fear, come 4 a.m., is telling euros (legal tender) from gyros (meat in a cone), and having enough of the former to buy the latter.

But don't let anyone in on this secret. Friends and family told many of us traveling to the Olympics that we were crazy or brave or both to go to Athens. And so the few of us in attendance at Olympic events last weekend—and many venues were virtually empty, quiet as a junior high school gymnasium—could imagine ourselves intrepid, as if watching the women's air pistol final were a heroic act.

Of course, the most life-threatening menace to that point was secondhand smoke, the guy next to you exhaling twin streams of it through his nostrils, like angry bulls do in cartoons. The streets *were* harrowing, but only because cabbies speed through them in reverse. There *was* a series of explosions above Athens, but they were glorious fireworks.

Still, we courageous tourists felt good about ourselves, boldly—one might say recklessly—braving beach volleyball by day, sipping ouzo under the Acropolis by night. In the war on terrorism, it is, quite literally, the least we can do. □

SCORE

DECISION 2004
WHO'S NO. 1 IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL?

SI Presents: The

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Democratic consultant James Carville

Who will play for the national championship?
RICE: Georgia and USC, but with a couple of caveats, one being that [Trojans receiver] Mike Williams's situation is resolved in USC's favor. He's a great player caught in a tough situation. I really think [Bulldogs quarterback] David Greene has a lot of talent, but Georgia seems to stumble late in the season. If they can avoid a late season fall, Georgia has the talent to be there.

Who wins?
RICE: I'd have to pick USC to win that game.

Who will win the major conference championships?
RICE: In the ACC, I'd pick Miami, though Florida State seems talented, and I like [quarterback] Chris Rix. I have a soft spot for guys with talent for whom it never seems to come together. The Big East is diminished, but you'd have to say West Virginia. In the SEC you'll probably see LSU versus Georgia in the championship game, and that's a toss-up, though I like Georgia. LSU is a school that lost so much talent they could go all the way or fall hard. The Big 12 is between Oklahoma and Texas, and I'll pick Texas. In the Big Ten, it's an Ohio State–Michigan battle, and it will come down to their game. I don't see anyone else in their league.

How will your pal Ty Willingham and Notre Dame do this year?
RICE: Really well. I like [quarterback] Brady Quinn. Having one season under his belt, being thrown into the fire as he was, is going to be great for him. But I don't know if they've got enough speed for it all to come together.

Handicap the Heisman race.
RICE: It comes down to Jason White at Oklahoma and Matt Leinart at USC. I think White wins it because Oklahoma has a good season and Leinart is a junior.

Which coach is on the hottest seat?
RICE: I'd have to say Mike Shula. The expectations of Alabama fans are so high and so tough. I lived there, and I understand how tough they are. It is going to be tough for him to win with the scholarship limits the NCAA placed on Alabama. The other person you have to talk about is Ty Willingham. Anytime you're at Notre Dame, you're on the hot seat.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE
(University of Denver, '74)
2005 ORANGE BOWL PICK: USC over Georgia
ON THE BCS: "It showed itself last year to be ineffective."

What's your upset special?
RICE: USC getting beat by Washington State. You don't want to go to Pullman in late October, that's for sure. They'll have to fly into Moscow, Idaho, and bus over. There could be snow, it could be a miserable place, and Washington State may need to win to get into the Rose Bowl.

What is a typical Saturday like for you watching games?
RICE: I'm in the office early, but I try to get out by early afternoon. Like most fans I go back and forth with my TV remote and watch as much as I can of games that matter to me.

As a former provost of Stanford, what's your take on the BCS?
RICE: I'm not a provost anymore. I'm a college football fan. As a college football fan I sure wish we had a playoff. I am not at all a fan of the BCS. It proved itself last year to be ineffective. What sport does not have the opportunity for a playoff to determine its true national champion?

Do you ever watch games with the President?
RICE: We watch at Camp David. He's great to watch them with. He's a great fan of sports and really knows his sports.

Do you ever root against Texas?
RICE: All the time. But never with him in the room.

Do you have a favorite team—and superstitions to help them?
RICE: I root for Notre Dame and Stanford. I, like most fans, am superstitious. I've had seasons where things were going well enough that I made sure to always wear the same shirt.

Did you wash the shirt between games?
RICE: Absolutely. I've never understood taking superstition that far.

How did you develop your passion for football?
RICE: My father was a guidance counselor and an assistant football coach at a high school. When my mother was pregnant, he was sure I would be his all-American linebacker. When I was born, he decided that he was going to teach me everything there was to know about the game anyway. I guess he didn't get an all-American linebacker. All he got was a national security adviser. You take it as you can.

JEFFERY A. SALTER (2)

Sports Illustrated
Edited by Mark Bechtel and Stephen Cannella

"Looking every bit the experienced looper, Lendl was all business as he counseled his daughter."
—CADDIE DEAREST, PAGE 30

Great Pigskin Debate

rarely see eye-to-eye, especially on USC and the Fighting Irish Interviews by Don Yaeger

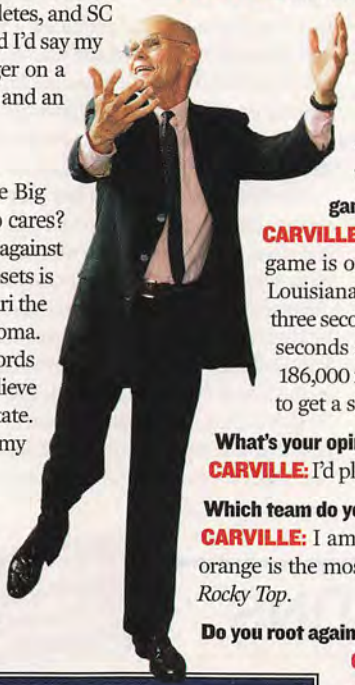
What will happen in the national championship game?
CARVILLE: Southern Cal plays Miami, and Miami will beat USC handily. Southern Cal doesn't play anyone. Miami's got better athletes, and SC will get worn out watching them score. Everyone expected I'd say my Tigers, but while LSU will be good, I can't pull the trigger on a team that's got Auburn, Florida and Georgia on the road and an inexperienced quarterback.

Who wins the major conference championships?
CARVILLE: In the ACC, Miami. LSU wins the SEC. The Big East—who cares? I mean West Virginia, but, again, who cares? The Big 12—man that's a tough, tough one. I'm going to go against all common sense and say Mizzou, because one of my upsets is Oklahoma State beating Oklahoma and that gives Missouri the edge. Well, maybe I'd better backtrack and go with Oklahoma. In the Big Ten, I thought about this, and I can't get the words out, but I am going to try: Minnesota. You know, I can't believe I didn't say Ohio State. Well, maybe I should say Ohio State. I'm going to be gutless, just like Michigan, and change my pick to Ohio State. Southern Cal in the Pac-10.

How will Notre Dame do this year?
CARVILLE: Not well. Notre Dame's problem is that no one in the athletic department ever took a class in the history department. They don't realize what happens when hubris and arrogance take control. All that arrogance usually leads to you getting your butt kicked, and that's what's going to happen to Notre Dame. For all those years they had their NBC contract, and they had all the nuns praying for them. Well, there aren't as many nuns as there used to be.

Handicap the Heisman race.
CARVILLE: The running back from Texas, Cedric Benson. With a close second to the running back at LSU [Justin Vincent].

Which team will fall the hardest this season?
CARVILLE: Michigan. Put the New England Patriots in Michigan uniforms and they'd lose two out of three to Ohio State and two out of three Rose Bowls. Michigan plays dull, uninspired, gutless football, year in and year out. Other than that, I like them fine.



JAMES CARVILLE
(Louisiana State University, '70)
2005 ORANGE BOWL PICK:
Miami over USC
ON THE BCS: "It's somewhere between syphilis and gonorrhea."

Which coach is on the hottest seat?
CARVILLE: Ron Zook at Florida. Mack Brown at Texas. If either one loses three, they're probably fired.

What's your upset special?
CARVILLE: Oklahoma State beats Oklahoma, Minnesota beats Michigan at Antarctica. Or Ann Arbor, if you want to call it that.

What is a typical Saturday like for you watching games?
CARVILLE: If LSU is on, leave Daddy alone. When an LSU game is on, I'm usually on the phone with somebody in Louisiana watching every play. But I have a satellite, so I'm three seconds behind the guy that doesn't have it. That three seconds screws up my life. If the speed of light travels at 186,000 miles a second, I don't see why it takes three seconds to get a satellite signal to my TV.

What's your opinion of the BCS?
CARVILLE: I'd place it somewhere between syphilis and gonorrhea.

Which team do you always root against?
CARVILLE: I am torn about Tennessee. I love the fans, but that orange is the most hideous color I've ever seen. And I can't stand *Rocky Top*.

Do you root against the President's Texas Longhorns?
CARVILLE: I certainly don't root for them. The thing about UT is they're arrogant. I just haven't figured what they have to be arrogant about.

Do you do anything superstitious to help LSU?
CARVILLE: Not really, but then I've never seen a need to change underwear between Labor Day and New Year's, either.

How did you develop your passion for football?
CARVILLE: In the South you get your passion for football from your mother's milk. I can't remember exactly when the passion kicked in, but it was sometime after I started eating food but before sex.

For more from Rice and Carville, go to **SI.com/football/ncaa.**

Taking a Pass

The NHL declines to get involved in yet another star's gambling mess

HE IS A square-jawed All-Star ambassador for his sport who pops up on TV to comment on pertinent NHL issues. But now Jeremy Roenick *is* an NHL issue, thanks to his involvement with a Florida gambling business the FBI broke up in April. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the Flyers center spent more than $100,000 with National Sports Consultants, a service that sold tips to bettors. The feds say NSC took illegal kickbacks from offshore Internet casinos and falsely promised clients inside information.

BETTOR BUSINESS Roenick said he wagered over $50,000 but not on hockey.

Roenick said he used the touts to make legal wagers on football. He is not charged with any criminal activity, and the FBI dropped its inquiry into him this summer after finding no evidence that he bet on hockey. (Roenick, who did not return calls from SI, told the *Inquirer* he never discussed hockey with the tout service and said he stopped gambling "cold turkey" last January after a warning from Flyers general manager Bob Clarke.)

The NHL considers that the end of the story—the league prohibits players from gambling on hockey but not on other sports. "If the story checks out as reported, there's been no violation of NHL rules," says Bill Daly, the league's chief legal officer. But Roenick's close ties to gambling firm employees—he left tickets for one at a Flyers playoff game in Tampa in May—don't seem to have set off the alarms in the NHL that they might have elsewhere. The NFL bars wagering on team sports and is proactive in monitoring players' gambling connections—witness the recent probe into Jerome Bettis's investment in a development that included a racetrack and slot machines. (The league ultimately okayed the deal.) Major League Baseball forbids only betting on baseball, but it has been quick to admonish players it sees accumulating significant gambling debt in any manner.

The NHL took no action last year following reports that All-Star forward Jaromir Jagr had run up a $500,000 debt to an Internet gambling site. And when NHL refs complained that director of officiating Andy Van Hellemond had hit them up for loans to pay horse racing debts, Van Hellemond resigned but was retained as a consultant (SI, Aug. 16). Still, Daly says the NHL has the problem under control: "To suggest that this happens more in hockey or that our policy on gambling is more lax than other sports is wrong."

GO FIGURE

0.14 Decrease in Red Sox righthander Derek Lowe's ERA, from 5.47 to 5.33, when centerfielder Johnny Damon asked to be charged with an error on a play that had been ruled a hit in a 14–4 win over the Devil Rays on Aug. 11.

$300,000 Amount retired heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis donated to the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, the first contribution by a pro athlete to the museum, which will open in 2005.

$60 Cost of the Stanley Cup tattoo Lightning coach John Tortorella had inked onto his left ankle.

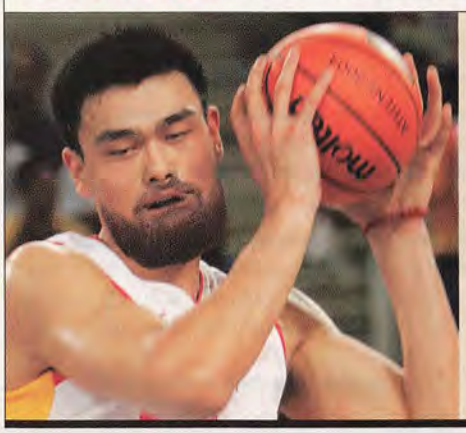
3 Rank, behind Coca-Cola and Nike, of the Boston Red Sox on the list of brands displayed or mentioned most often on prime-time network shows during the 2003–04 broadcast season, according to a Nielsen study.

$1,700 Amount Allen Iverson owes the Philadelphia Parking Authority for unpaid parking tickets on his 2004 Rolls-Royce Phantom.

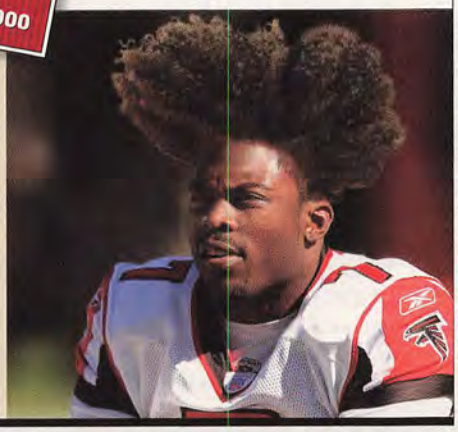
16 Olympic swimsuits—the team's entire supply—that the British women's triathlon squad sent for emergency alterations because the white garments became translucent when wet.

HAIRY SITUATIONS

HOW THEY'LL LOOK ACCORDING TO SI's JOHNNYDAMONIZER 4000

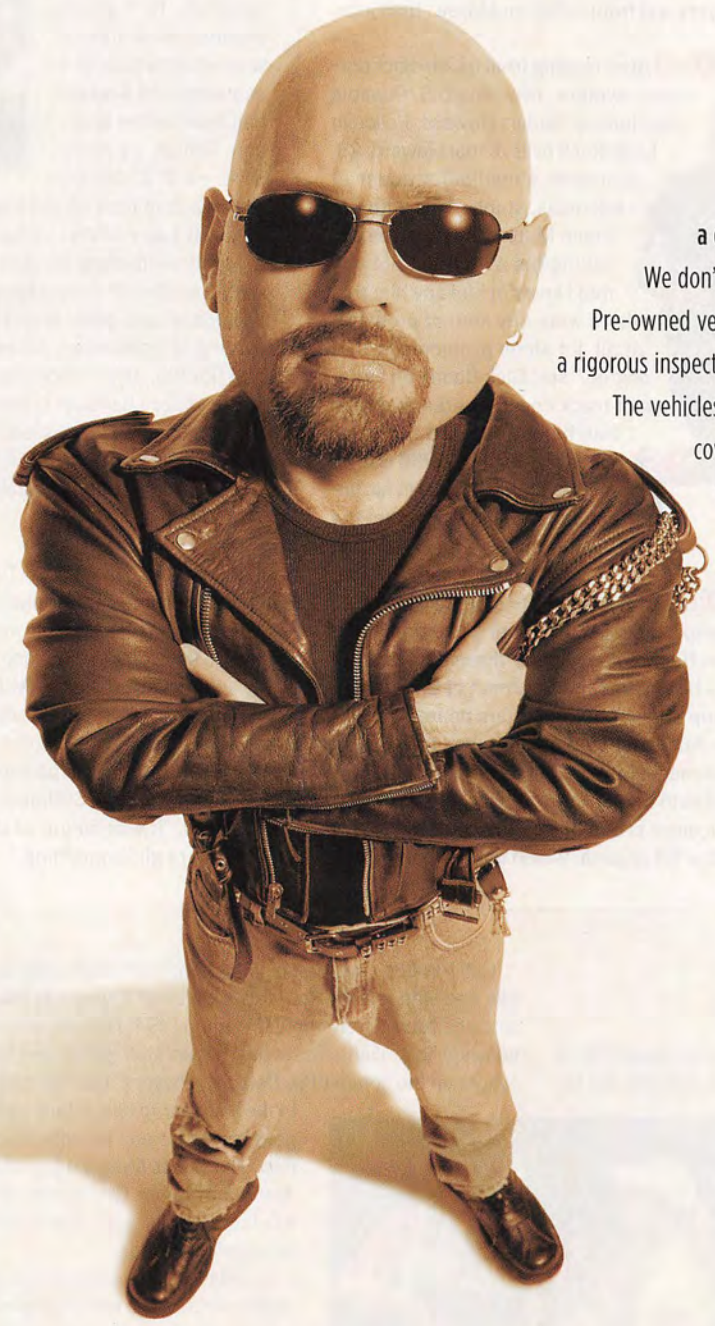


Now's not a good time to be an athlete's barber. First, Falcons quarterback Michael Vick—who broke his leg shortly after getting a haircut last season—said he wouldn't trim his locks until the Falcons win the Super Bowl. Then Yao Ming vowed that China would make the Olympic quarterfinals: "If we don't, I won't shave for six months as punishment." Chances are, both will have hirsute futures: The Falcons were drubbed by the Ravens 24–0 in their preseason opener, and China lost to Spain by 25 in its first Olympic game.



IMAGES OF VICK AND MING WERE ALTERED BY SI IMAGING. DAVID DUROCHIK/SPORTSPICS (VICK); LG PATTERSON/AP (AFRO); DUSAN VRANIC/AP (MING); JESSICA RINALDI/REUTERS (BEARD); G. ABEL/WIRE IMAGE.COM (ROENICK); ROBERT LABERGE/GETTY IMAGES (PRESS CONFERENCE)

"No. It's never been in an accident. My mother only drove it to the store and back. You got a problem with that?"



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FOR THE RECORD

Bid adieu To international soccer, midfielder Zinedine Zidane, 32. The three-time world player of the year last week announced his retirement from the French national team, which he led to the 1998 World Cup title and the 2000 European championship. Zidane *(right)* scored twice in the '98 Cup final against Brazil but is known more for his playmaking ability. "When we don't know what to do," teammate Bixente Lizarazu once said, "we just give it to Zizou, and he works something out." It paid off: Les Bleus lost just seven of the 93 games Zidane played. "It's not easy to stop after 10 years full of highs and lows . . . especially highs," said Zidane, who will continue to play for Real Madrid. "But my hour has come."

Threatened To go on strike to prevent contraction, the Japanese Pro Baseball Players Association. Last Thursday 98% of Japan's 750 players authorized a walkout. While no strike date has been set, it could happen as early as Sept. 8, when an owners' meeting will be held to approve the merger of the Orix BlueWave and Kintetsu Buffaloes. The players are concerned that owners will turn the 12-team, two-league system into one league with 10 teams and cost hundreds of players and front-office employees their jobs.

Died After leaping from a 10th-floor dormitory window, two-time U.S. Olympic triple jumper Robert Howard. Police in Little Rock believe that Howard, 28, who was a medical student at Arkansas, stabbed his wife, Dr. Robin Mitchell, to death before taking his own life. "Nobody that I know of had any hint that there were any kind of problems at all, let alone problems to that degree," said Dick Booth, an assistant track coach at Arkansas who had helped Howard (who finished eighth at the 1996 Games and seventh in 2000) in his unsuccessful bid to make the 2004 Olympic team.

Died Of a stroke, the oldest known U.S. Olympic medalist, 102-year-old James Stillman Rockefeller. Nearly three decades before he became the chairman of Citigroup and sat on numerous boards, the Yale varsity oarsman rowed to a gold medal in the eights at the Paris Games in 1924. (A true Eli, Rockefeller was more proud of beating Harvard in the '24 regatta, which landed him on the July 7, 1924, cover of TIME.) Rockefeller, who was a grandnephew of John D. Rockefeller, hung his Olympic medal on a nail to the side of the library fireplace in his Greenwich, Conn., home. Miffed that his medal was really made of bronze, Rockefeller had it gold-plated. "My grandfather was painfully modest," his grandson Stillman Rockefeller says. "It was so out of character for him to gild something."

Died Two days before her 92nd birthday, Julia Child, the French Chef who balanced a devotion to buttery cuisine with a lifelong love of athletics. She captained the basketball team at the Branson School in Ross, Calif.—a 6′ 2″ center, she was dominant on the jump balls that followed every basket in the 1920s—and enjoyed swimming, hockey and tennis while a student at Smith College. Later she became an avid golfer and skier and, after moving to Cambridge, Mass., a staunch Red Sox fan. Asked what she would serve at the victory banquet if Boston won the World Series, Child warbled, "That's easy. Butterflied leg of lamb, beans, tomato salad and lots of ice cream and cake."

Caddie Dearest

Lugged The clubs of Isabelle Lendl, 13, the youngest competitor at last week's U.S. Women's Amateur Championship in Erie, Pa., by her father, former tennis star Ivan Lendl. Looking every bit the experienced looper in a visor, wraparound shades and a blue USGA smock, the 44-year-old Lendl was characteristically businesslike as he washed balls, tended pins and counseled his daughter on shot distances and club choices. Isabelle shot respectable qualifying rounds of 76 and 78 on the par-72 Kahkwa Club course before being knocked out in the first round of match play on Aug. 11. "It helps to have him here," Isabelle said of her father. "He knows course management more than I do."

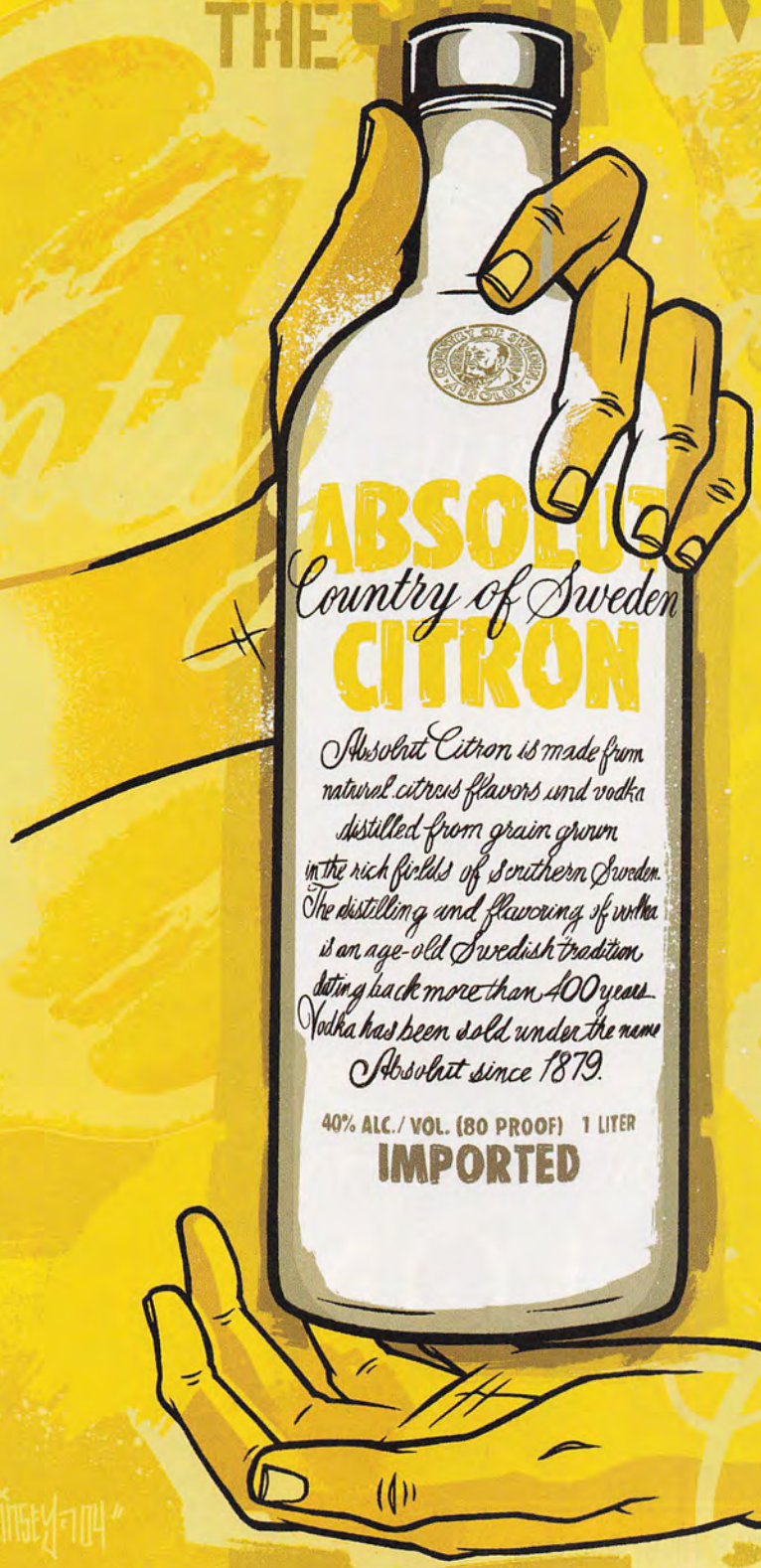
BAG MAN Lendl kept a low profile as Isabelle advanced to the final 64.

Golf has been an obsession for Lendl (who won eight Grand Slam titles and was ranked No. 1 for 270 straight weeks in the mid-1980s) since he retired from the ATP tour in 1994. He's played in several Nationwide Tour events (he is nearly a scratch golfer) and he's won three events on the competitive Celebrity Players Tour. But he's scaled back in the last year to spend time caddying for his daughters. (He and his wife, Samantha, have five.) His oldest, Marika, 14, is a regular on the American Junior Golf Association tour and this fall will enroll at the David Leadbetter Golf Academy in Florida.

Lendl drew a laugh from the gallery as Isabelle prepared to tee off one morning when he responded to a boisterous fan by saying, "I didn't think they were selling beer so early." But for the most part he took pains to stay out of the spotlight, saying, "It's all about her this week." Still, the caddie couldn't resist a quick diagnosis of Isabelle's game. "I thought she hit it O.K.," he said. "She hit good tee shots but missed some short putts."

ACTION IMAGES (ZIDANE); TED GARTLAND/THE BOSTON HERALD (CHILD); TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (ROCKEFELLER); GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS (LENDLS)

FLAVOR THE SUMMER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THE SHOW | BY BILL SCHEFT

(Note to reader: For the next two weeks, if you miss any of the jokes, they will be replayed at 11 p.m. on Bravo and 4 a.m. on Telemundo.)

NBC DEEP INTO 1,210-HOUR OLYMPIC COVERAGE Here's how it breaks down: 30 hours of features, 45 hours of actual events, 1,135 hours of people going through the metal detector at the Athens airport.

See the opening ceremonies? I'm so embarrassed. I thought that fabric covering all the athletes was a Salute to Masking Agents.

Greece's top two sprinters suspended after missing a scheduled drug test. And yet whoever designed Björk's dress walks the streets a free man.

Konstantinos Kenteris, the defending 200-meter gold medalist, missed the test when he was involved in a suspicious motorcycle accident. I think I know his brother, Jeff Kenteris.

In soccer, the Iraqi team scored a big upset over Portugal and then beat Costa Rica. See? All that practice kicking around the head of the Saddam statue paid off.

You can really see the American influence. The best players on the Iraqi soccer team are the preemptive strikers.

IT'S ALL P.R.: DREAM TEAM SHOCKED IN OPENER O.K., that does it. Next Olympics we send the Globetrotters.

Puerto Rico was not even favored to win a medal. The team has only one NBA player, and the rest are guys from the Sharks.

Team USA has a lot of weaknesses. I'm no Antonin Scalia, but wouldn't any judge in the country consider two weeks of Kobe sticking jumpers in Athens a form of community service?

NFL PREPARES FOR KICKOFF CONCERT AT GILLETTE STADIUM To avoid a repeat of the Super Bowl halftime show, league officials will attend all rehearsals and monitor song selection, choreography and staging. Great. So now, we can be confident that Elton John will have both feet inbounds at all times.

Here's the lineup for the concert: Elton John, Destiny's Child, Toby Keith, Mary J. Blige and a new rap group, Run-FCC.

Meanwhile, the Browns signed their top draft choice, Kellen Winslow Jr., to the largest NFL contract ever for a tight end. They waited to announce the deal until all papers were filed with the league and Tony Gonzalez was properly sedated.

Forty million, and Winslow has yet to play a down in the NFL. Now there's a switch—a Miami player getting away with a holdup after he leaves school.

The Bucs-Bengals preseason game had to be postponed due to Hurricane Charley. In a related story Keenan McCardell is moving north of Tampa at 55 mph.

INDIANS SURGING IN AL CENTRAL The Tribe leads the majors in runs scored. What happened? Did Serrano finally learn to hit a curve?

Elsewhere Giants starter Kirk Rueter says he's been suffering from a sports hernia all season. Help me out here. Does a sports hernia occur when a pitcher keeps getting lifted?

The Royals demoted shortstop Angel Berroa to Wichita of the Texas League. I believe that makes him the first former Rookie of the Year sent to AA since Darryl Strawberry.

TERRELL OWENS MAKES LESS-THAN-VEILED REMARKS IN *PLAYBOY* ABOUT JEFF GARCIA'S SEXUALITY This coming from a guy who demanded a costume change.

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy Bananarama.

Bill Scheft is the creator of the new Golf Channel reality series, Last Comic Slicing.

Q+A RULON GARDNER

The 33-year-old Greco-Roman wrestler is in Athens and will begin defending his Olympic superheavyweight title on Aug. 23.

SI: *Have you had any of the following yet: gyros, souvlaki or ouzo?*
Gardner: Ouzo, no. The other two, yes. I did have one bite of cow stomach the other day. It was good, but it was cow stomach.

SI: *What did you think Athens would be like?*
Gardner: I was here in '99 and '01 and I expected it to be the same. Everybody was saying how bad it was going to be and how it wasn't organized, and I kind of expected that. But the people have changed this country overnight. If you look at everything they've had to do in the last five or six years, it is a miracle that they are ready.

SI: *You were married last month, and your wife, Lisa, will be in Athens along with 15 other members of your family. What would it be like if I sat in the Gardner section during one of your matches?*
Gardner: You'd feel scared and loved at the same time.

SI: *Which pro athlete would make a good wrestler?*
Gardner: Karl Malone. He's tall and powerful. And I'm good friends with Larry Walker, who is a big guy and has a little meanness to him. We've wrestled a few times and I've put him in a few front headlocks. At that point he didn't respond very much.

SI: *You're retiring after these Games. Will you leave your shoes on the mat after your final match?*
Gardner: That's what I plan on doing.

SI: *When it comes to everyday life, what's the biggest advantage of being 264 pounds?*
Gardner: People move out of your way when you are coming through. And you can go to the buffet line and really handle yourself.

SI: *On Feb. 14, 2002, your snowmobile dropped into a Wyoming lake, and you were stranded for 17 hours in subzero conditions. You keep the amputated middle toe from your right foot in a jar of formaldehyde in your fridge. Do you recommend refrigerating any other body parts?*
Gardner: Not really [laughs]. But it is hot in Athens and you will need an air conditioner. —*Richard Deitsch*

For more from Rulon Gardner, go to si.com/siexclusive.

THANASSIS STAVRAKIS/AP (GARDNER WITH MEDAL); JOHN BAZEMORE/AP (GARDNER WRESTLING); ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WONG

SPORTS BEAT

PICTURE THIS Great balls of fire! U.S. Forest Service fire engineer Keith Orr made a sizzling save when he booted a soccer ball out of harm's way while fighting a rapidly spreading wildfire near Lake Shasta, Calif., last week that forced 800 people to flee their homes. Orr might have a future in MLS—with the Chicago Fire.

WHEN SHE RETURNS from Athens, where she is leading the U.S. softball team in its quest to win its third straight Olympic gold medal, **Jennie Finch** (*page 59*) will have little time to relax. She'll marry Diamondbacks righthander **Casey Daigle**, 23, later this fall. The day after he met her two years ago, Daigle sent Finch, 23, four dozen roses. Then he asked her out. "I said no because that was too creepy," said Finch *(below)*. "But he hung around, and we got together." Daigle proposed to the 23-year-old pitcher on the softball field at the University of Arizona, where she starred before graduating in 2002. "He blindfolded me and took me to the mound and said, 'You have been the queen of the diamond for four years. Now I want you to be the queen of my heart,' " said Finch. The blonde windmiller, who marketing execs think can make over a million dollars in endorsements after the Olympics, said yes. The pitcher perfect couple is planning an Oct. 30 wedding, followed by a honeymoon in Bora Bora.

■ The college football season hasn't started yet, but Texas back **Cedric Benson** *(right)* has already chalked up an impressive run. On Aug. 10 he witnessed a one-car accident on Interstate 35 near Austin. The Heisman hopeful was the first person to reach the totaled Chrysler Sebring of **Angie Samuels**, who was uninjured in the wreck. She told Benson that her husband, **Jerry**, worked at a nearby car dealership, so Benson took off, running a quarter mile to notify him of the accident. "I just did what I was always taught to do," Benson said. "You see someone who needs help, and you help them." Jerry visited Benson at practice last week to thank him, and he and his wife plan to buy Longhorns season tickets.

■ Despite rumors to the contrary, **David Beckham** is deeply into pants. A few months ago he bought (for $1,700) and framed a pair that **Johnny Depp** wore in *Edward Scissorhands*. Now English pop star **Robbie Williams** has revealed that Beckham once phoned him to find out where he purchased his jeans so Beckham could buy a matching pair. In *Feel*, a new book about Williams that hits stores on Sept. 1, the singer tells of the mutual admiration he and Beckham have for each other. In addition to trousers, they also keep a keen eye on each other's coifs. "I've got people I employ just to hair-watch David Beckham," said Williams.

■ Blame it on the elaborate tribute to **Eros**, the Greek goddess of love, during the Olympics' opening ceremonies: The Australian women's water polo team has assembled a $350 pot, with the money going to the first girl to kiss U.S. tennis star **Andy Roddick**. . . . **Alex Rodriguez** has obviously found his first season with the Yankees to be a moving experience. The well-compensated third baseman and his wife, **Cynthia**, were recently seen looking at an Upper East Side apartment in a building where the units, which come with herringbone oak flooring and windows imported from England, start at $7.865 million. . . . It's hard to picture them wearing the relatively staid stylings of **Joseph Abboud**, but club-hopping Giants tight end **Jeremy Shockey** and ultracool Knicks point guard **Stephon Marbury** have signed endorsement deals with the designer. Abboud, attempting an image makeover, is also dressing **Andre 3000** of Outkast. . . . **Steven Spielberg** has halted work on *Vengeance*, his film about the hunt for the Palestinian terrorists who killed 11 members of the 1972 Israeli Olympic team in Munich, out of fear that the set in Poland would itself become a terrorist target.

THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The president of Turkmenistan, a poor desert nation in Central Asia, has ordered that a palace made of ice be built so "our children can learn to ski."

« THEY SAID IT LOU HOLTZ

South Carolina football coach, on the one writer who voted the Gamecocks No. 1 in the SEC preseason poll: "He probably voted with a crayon."

LUCAS MOBLEY RECORD SEARCHLIGHT/AP (PICTURE THIS); ALLEN KEE/WIREIMAGE.COM (HOLTZ); HARRY CABLUCK/AP (BENSON); PAUL J. SUTTON/CORBIS (FINCH)

IF ONLY THEY GAVE MEDALS FOR JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS.

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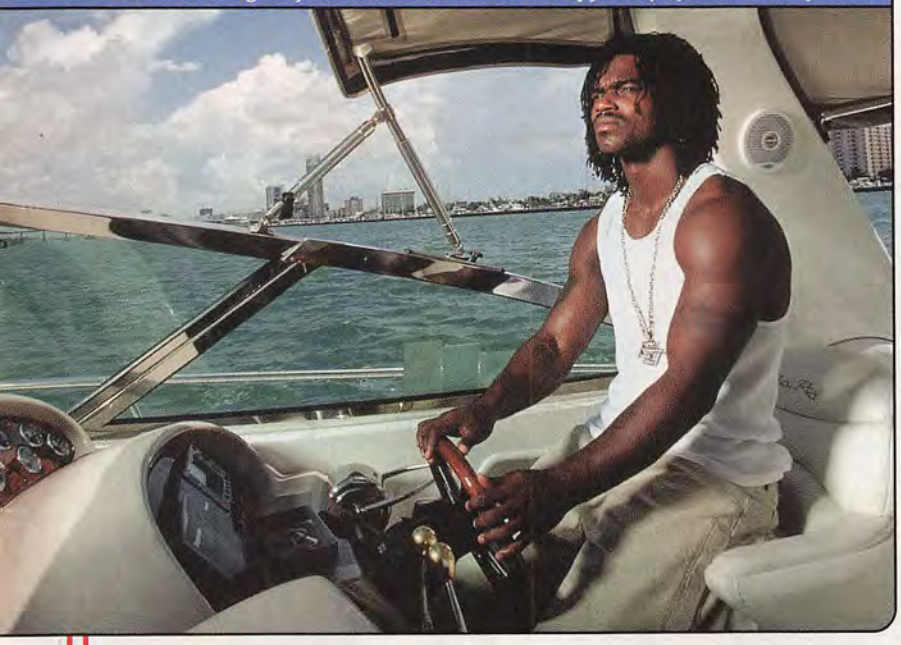

All aboard: Edge stays Stressss Freeee with his crew of fellow players and other friends.

FOOTBALL IS ONLY ONE of the games Edgerrin James enjoys. In between dodging linebackers, the 6-foot, 215-pound Indianapolis Colts running back fills his days shooting pool or baskets with friends, blasting along South Florida's intercoastal waterway on one of his four jet skis, offroading on a four-wheeler and working out at the University of Miami or his home gym in Immokalee, Fla. In a lot of ways, the 26-year-old's off-season matches the name of his 38-foot Sea Ray—Stressss Freeee. "I put the emphasis on it with two extra s's and two extra e's, just to let everybody know how we live," he says. "We come out to have a good time."

How often do you use Stressss Freeee? We hit the boat whenever somebody wants to do something. **Any overnight trips?** No, we just ride around. **Who is we?** Me, Clinton Portis, Santana Moss, Bubba Franks, all the guys from the University of Miami. Plus other guys like Charles Woodson, Plaxico Burress and Jevon Kearse come down. We're like one big crew. And our number one rapper is Trick Daddy, so we always have Trick Daddy. **You have him on the boat or going in the CD player?** On the boat. Right now he's learning how to drive.

So Trick's your favorite? When it comes to rappers, it's like your mama's cooking. I don't care how good someone else's cooking is, your mama's is the best. **He ever mention you in a song?** No, no, no. I did a couple videos with him. He always told me he'd make a song for me, but I was like, "Not yet." **What are you waiting for?** As soon as we make the Super Bowl, I'll be coming out on a single with Trick. **Like a modern *Super Bowl Shuffle*?** We'll do something special.

What do you play in pool? Just regular eight ball. **Are you any good?** I'm all right. Some nights, when I slow down and focus, I hardly miss. But I like to play around and talk a lot, so I get distracted. **Have your own stick?** [Pool pro] Jeanette Lee, the Black Widow, she's getting me a stick. I put in my order, so I just gotta go pick it up. **What kind is it?** I'm not sure. She told me she's going to get me the one she plays with, the high-end stick. **So right now you use a house stick?** I'd use the back of a broom if I had to. **Would that affect your game?** Depends who you're playing. **You ever rack 'em against Jeanette Lee?** Yeah, but she kind of played by herself because I didn't shoot. She took off.

Do you jet-ski in the ocean? The ocean is kind of boring because there's so many waves. You want to be on the intercoastal where it's smooth and you can do tricks. **Tricks?** Go real fast, throw water on each other, do things people are scared to do. **Where do you take the four-wheelers?** We're everywhere on those. We have some nice places to ride. **How many do you have?** I own some. I'm in the process of getting one souped up so it's super fast and looks good. **What are you doing to it?** I can't tell anyone 'cause we all compete. Like I was riding Trick Daddy's bike, and his was pretty fast, but one of my partners' bikes was even faster. You don't like people to know what you did to your bike because they're gonna do the same thing.

The James Gang

Edge is tight with his inner child. "Everything a kid likes to do, I like to do," he says. From Miami to Indy to his Immokalee, Fla., hometown, the two-time NFL rushing champ and his eponymous foundation often take children bowling, mini-golfing and to the beach or movies. "Put me in any city, I'll end up doing something with kids," he says. "That's the time of your life when it's pure fun."

WITH JORDAN HYMAN PHOTOS: JEFFERY A. SALTER, TOM STRICKLAND/AP (INSET) © 2004 TIME INC.

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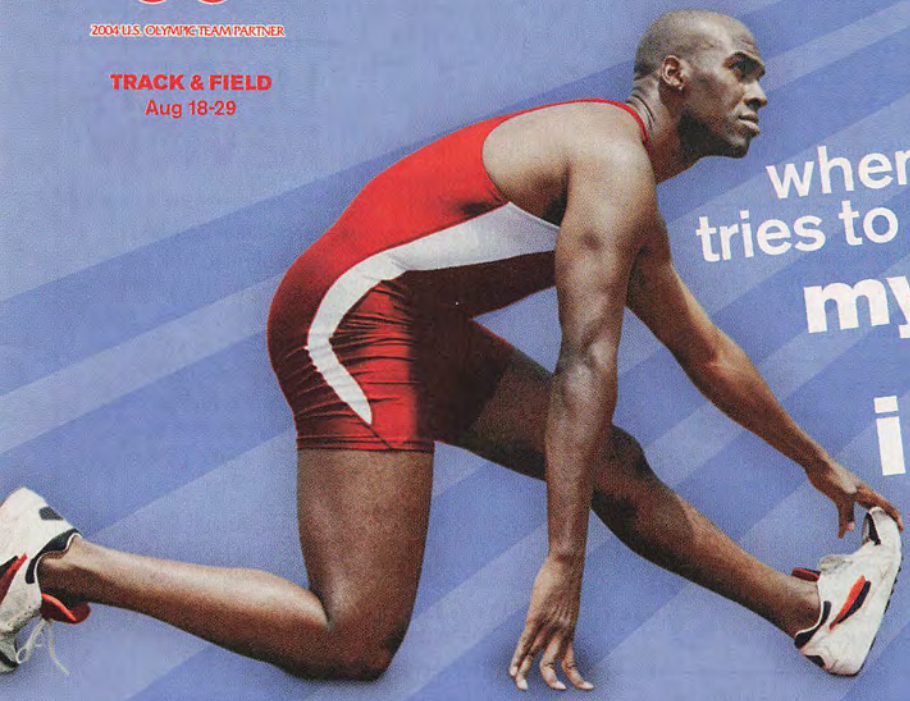

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THE WEEK AHEAD

WHAT TO WATCH AND WATCH FOR BY JULIA MORRILL

FRIDAY 20

OLYMPICS TENNIS MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SINGLES SEMIFINALS BRAVO 5 PM > Venus Williams's chances of defending her singles gold medal got better when sister Serena withdrew with a knee injury. As for a second straight doubles gold, the sisters were heavy favorites, but Venus now plays with Chanda Rubin.

SATURDAY 21

INDIANS AT TWINS FOX 1 PM > Three games under .500 at the All-Star break, the Tribe has gone 21–11 since and pulled within two games of the Central Division–leading Twins. • **ALABAMA STAKES** ESPN 5 PM >The field at Saratoga for the final leg of the Triple Tiara—New York's Triple Crown for fillies—features the winners of the first two jewels, Stellar Jayne and Ashado.

SUNDAY 22

MAJOR LEAGUE LACROSSE CHAMPIONSHIP ESPN2 1 PM > The league's fourth title game takes place at Boston U's Nickerson Field. • **U.S. AMATEUR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP** ESPN2 3 PM > The 312-player field that came to Winged Foot in Mamaroneck, N.Y., on Aug. 16 will be down to two, who'll play 36 holes for the title.

MONDAY 23

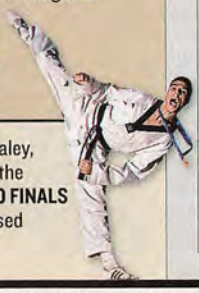
***CLASSIC DRIVE THRU*: ANGELS AT ORIOLES, SEPT. 6, 1995** ESPNCLASSIC 9 PM > A must for clapping buffs: Cal Ripken Jr. breaks Lou Gehrig's record by playing in his 2,131st consecutive game and receives a 22-minute ovation. • **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!** Sonny Jurgensen turns 70. The Hall of Fame quarterback is now a Redskins radio analyst.

TUESDAY 24

OLYMPICS TRACK AND FIELD NBC 8 PM > Gail Devers, 37, goes in the 100-meter hurdles, an event she's won 10 times at the national championships but never at the Olympics. In the pole vault America's Stacy Dragila is the defending champ, but Russia's Svetlana Feofanova and Yelena Isibaeva beat her to the 16-feet barrier.

WEDNESDAY 25

OLYMPICS BASEBALL GOLD MEDAL GAME MSNBC 1 PM > It might be America's national pastime, but the U.S. nine were knocked out by Mexico in the qualifying round. Cuba is the favorite, but Greece—with a team comprised primarily of Americans—is a wild card.



THURSDAY 26

STEELERS AT EAGLES ESPN 8 PM > Free-agent pickup Duce Staley, who rushed for 1,000 yards three times in seven seasons with the Eagles, returns to Philly as a Steeler. • **OLYMPICS TAEKWONDO FINALS** CNBC 5 PM > Texan Steven Lopez, whose sister Diana just missed qualifying for the Games, tries for a second straight gold.

UNDER REVIEW

▸ **ED (SPEEDO) JAGER** knows he'll never be a NASCAR driver, but if he can take his lovingly tended, souped-up old wrecks and "go out and blow people away" on the national demolition derby circuit, he'll still feel like a champion. In *Speedo: A Demolition Derby Love Story* (PBS, Aug. 24), Jager says his passion is "like nitro-methane through your veins." *Speedo* is not only a lively, smash-'em-up tale of Jager's love affair with his cars, which he subjects to untold abuse, but also an affecting portrait of a 41-year-old auto mechanic with a weathered face and grease-embedded nails who smokes cigarettes and guzzles Mountain Dew while chasing his dream. But *Speedo* also shows a softer side of its subject. While his marriage is falling apart, Jager, who has two sons, meets "a lady friend" who shares his passion for derbies. Liz loves him, he says, quietly astonished at his good fortune, and is "a one-woman pit crew." What more could a guy possibly ask for?

—Nancy Ramsey

SI.com | THE POLL POSITION

What was the most memorable moment from the first weekend of the Olympics?

- ○ The opening ceremonies
- ○ Michael Phelps setting the 400-meter IM world record
- ○ Puerto Rico beating the Dream Team
- ○ Iraq's soccer team winning twice

Vote at **SI.com/olympics.** *Watch for the results here next week.*

Last week's poll results: We asked how the Dream Team would fare in the Olympics. With more than 32,000 votes in, here are the results: gold medal (40%); no medal (31%); bronze medal (16%); silver medal (14%).

DANNY MOLOSHOK/AP (WILLIAMS); JIM KIRCHNER/ICON SMI (LAX); RICK RICKMAN/NEW SPORT/CORBIS (DRAGILA); BOB MARTIN (LOPEZ); BEN M ARTIN/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (CASTRO); PHILLIP LEONIAN (JURGENSEN); MEL LEVINE (HAT); ANDREW WALLACE/REUTERS (HAFNER)

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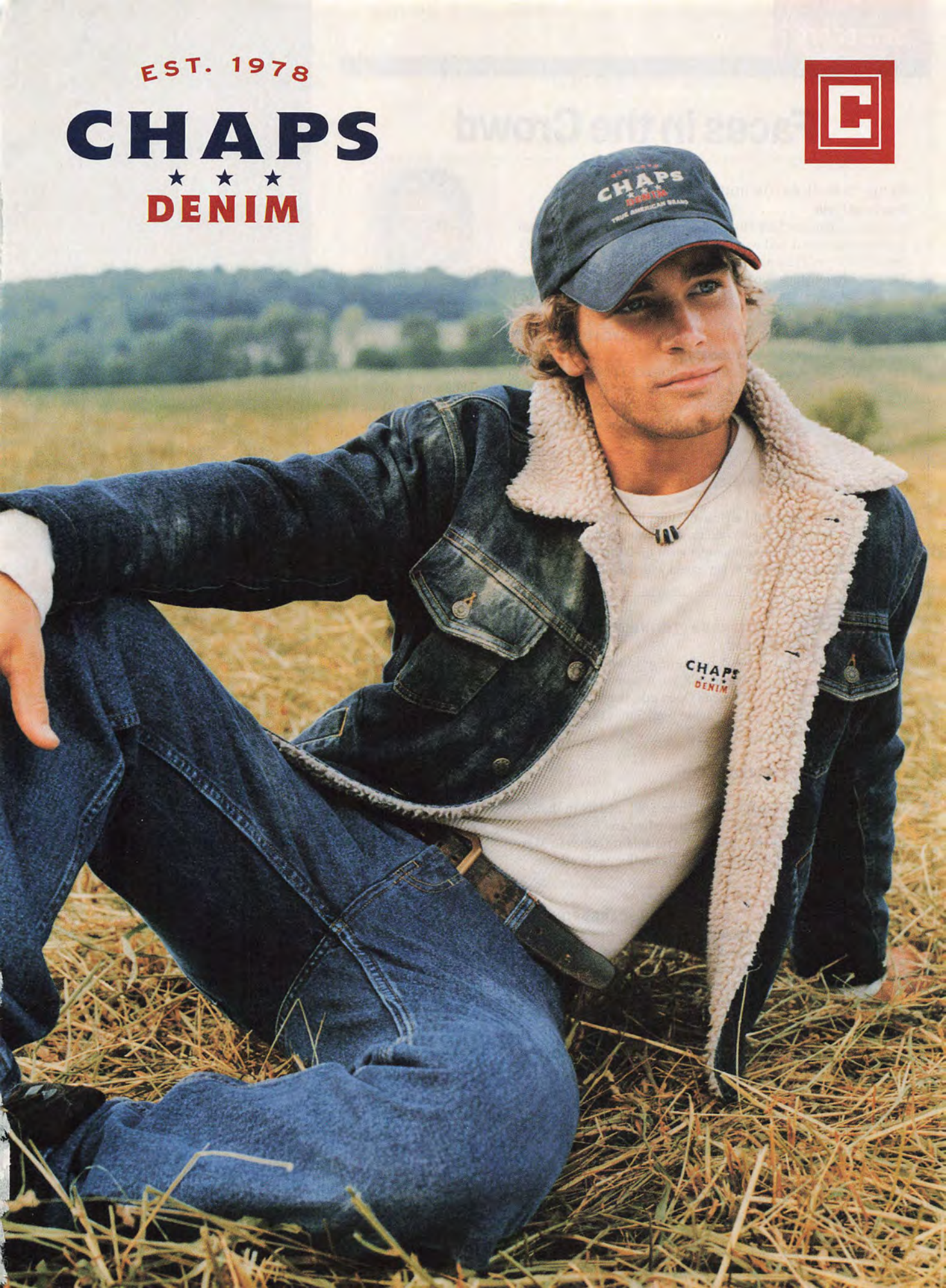
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Faces in the Crowd

Kenneth Hall, BATON ROUGE
Track and Field
Kenneth, a senior at Tara High, jumped 54' 10¼" to set a national high school record and win the gold medal in the young men's (under 20) triple jump at the National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships. He was named male athlete of the meet.

Aubrey Walton, SYCAMORE, OHIO
Softball
Walton, a righthanded pitcher and June graduate of Mohawk High, ended her high school career with a 64–6 record and a state-record 43 straight wins. She had 435 strikeouts and an 0.43 ERA and led the Warriors to their first and only state softball championship in 2003.

Homer Bailey, LA GRANGE, TEXAS
Baseball
Bailey, a June graduate of La Grange High, led the Leopards to a Texas Class 3A title for the second time and was named the championship game MVP. The righthander went 15–0 this season, struck out 201 and had an 0.68 ERA. He signed with the Cincinnati Reds.

Danah Ford, INDIANAPOLIS
Golf
Ford, a recent graduate of Indiana, won her second Indiana Women's State Amateur championship and also took the state Women's Open title, becoming the first woman to win both events in the same year. She is the 2004 Big Ten champion.

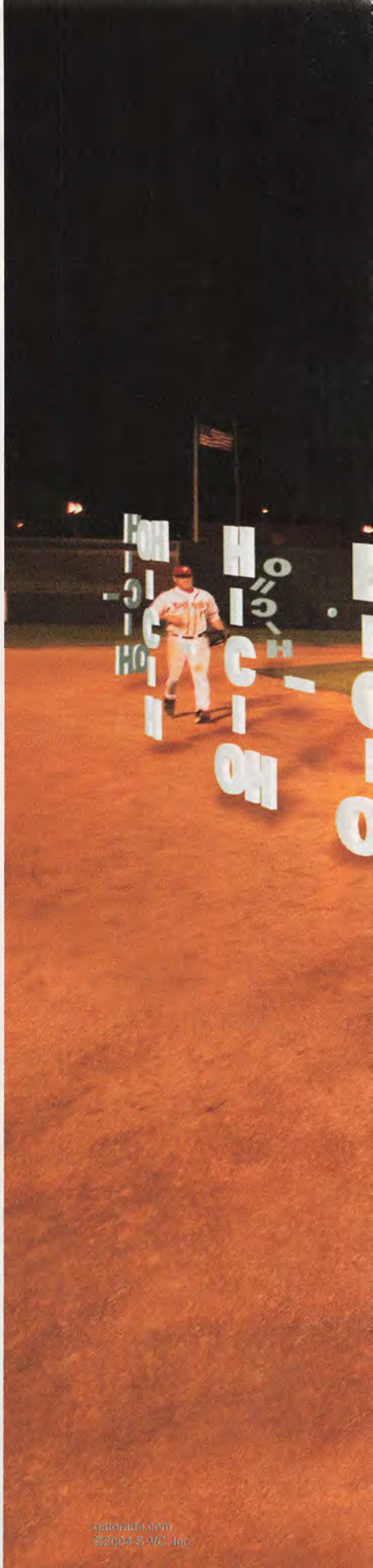
Padraic McCole, ROSEMONT, PA.
Swimming
Padraic, a junior at Harriton High, won gold medals in the 50-meter freestyle, 100-meter individual medley and 50-meter and 100-meter butterfly at the 2004 U.S. Transplant Games in Minneapolis. He was named the meet's outstanding male athlete.

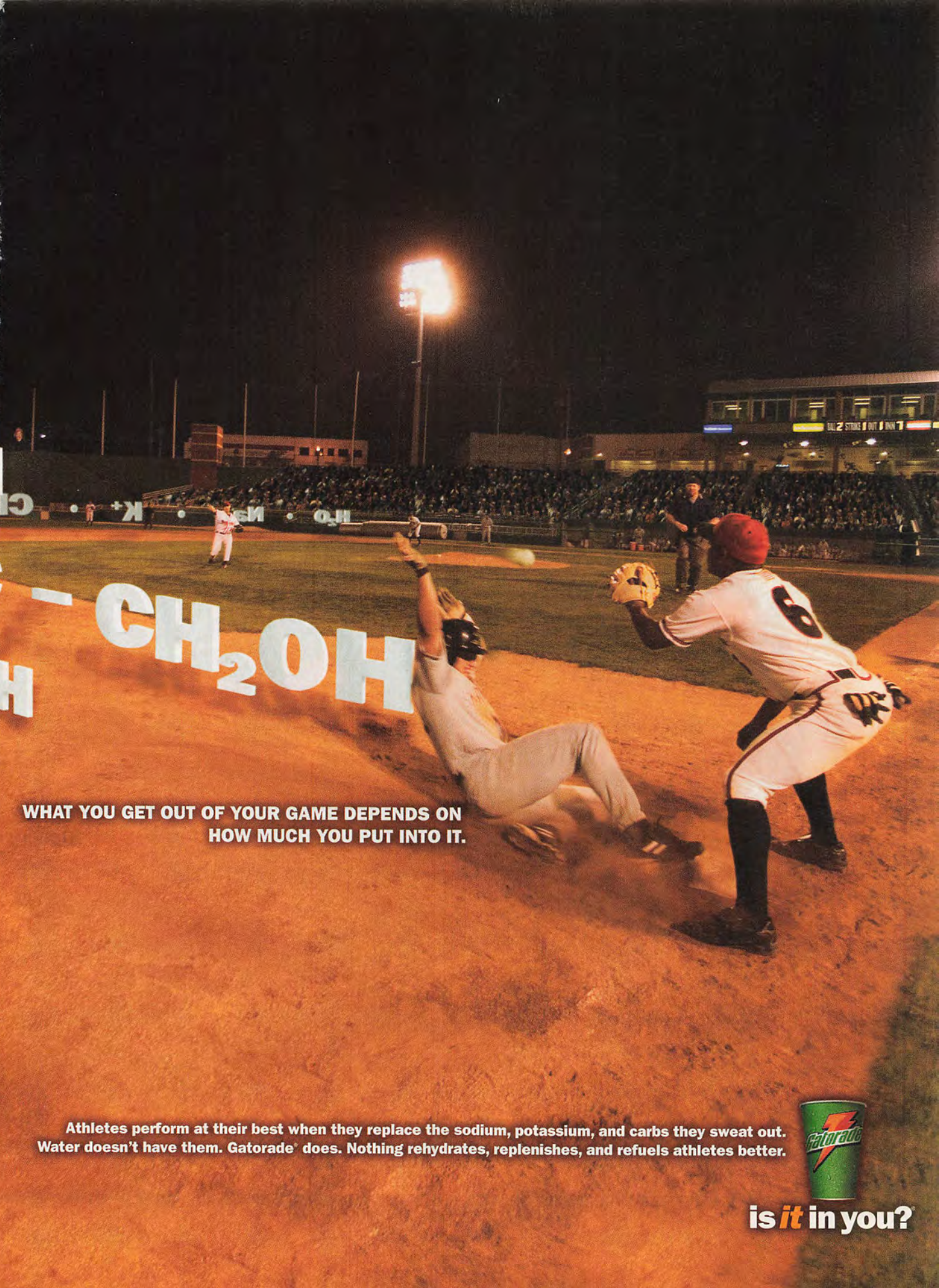
Camille Jania, SCARBOROUGH, MAINE
Tennis
Camille, a freshman at Scarborough High, won the women's singles title at the Betty Blakeman Memorial Tournament. A week earlier she had won the Maine Tennis Association's women's title without losing a game. She has won four tournaments in three months.

Mike Geiger, NAPERVILLE, ILL.
Powerlifting
Geiger, 38, a police officer, won the squat, bench press and deadlift in his division (111.0 kg. and over, open) at the 2004 Can-Am Police-Fire Games in London, Ont. He was the men's best overall lifter and is undefeated in 12 years of police and firefighter events.

SI.com *To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to* **SI.com/faces.**

FROM TOP: BILL FEIG; OSBORNE'S PHOTOGRAPHY; J. MERIC; PETER H. BICK; JIM LUZZI; CHRIS SMITH/OCEAN EXPOSURE; DAVID DUROCHIK/SPORTPICS

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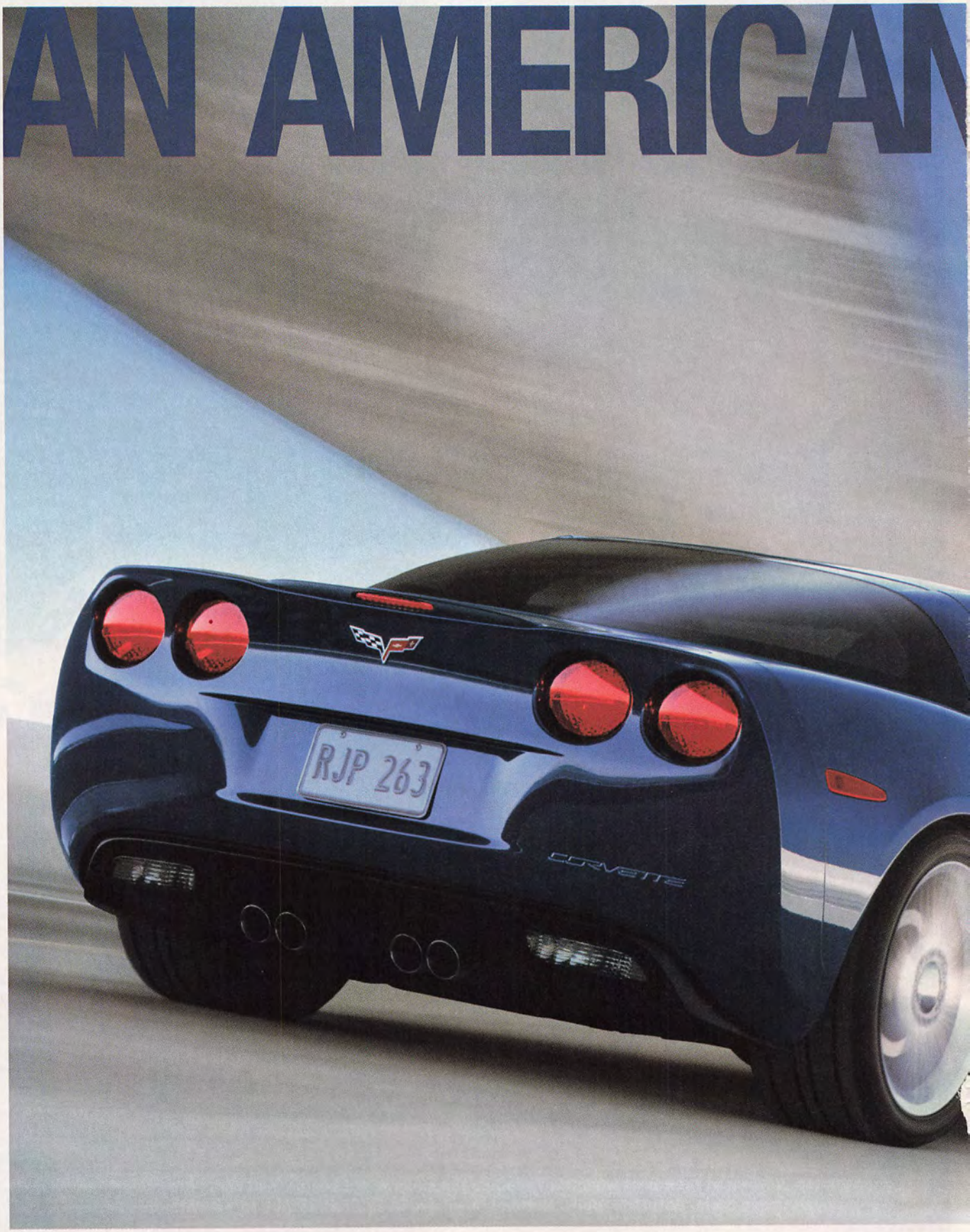

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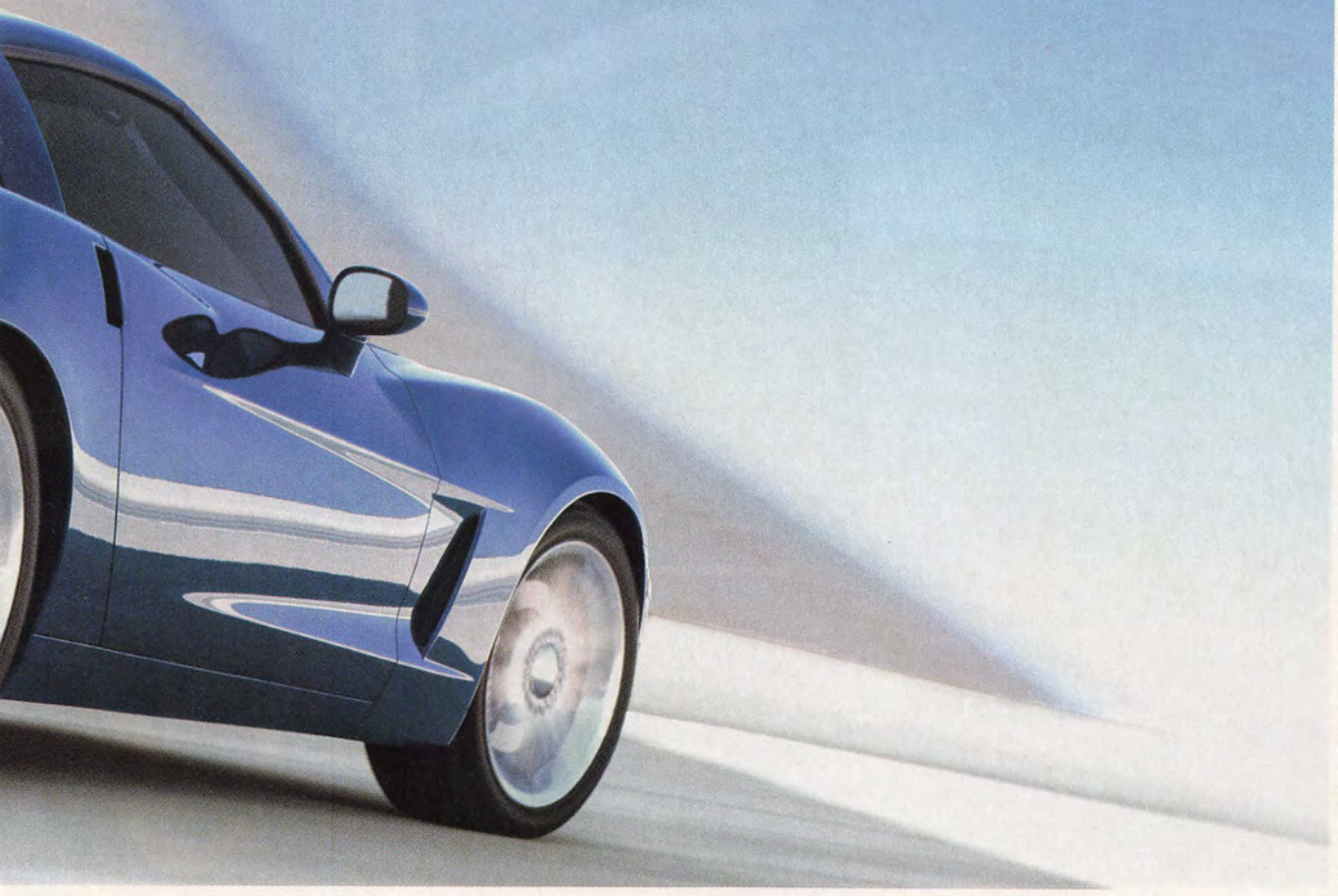

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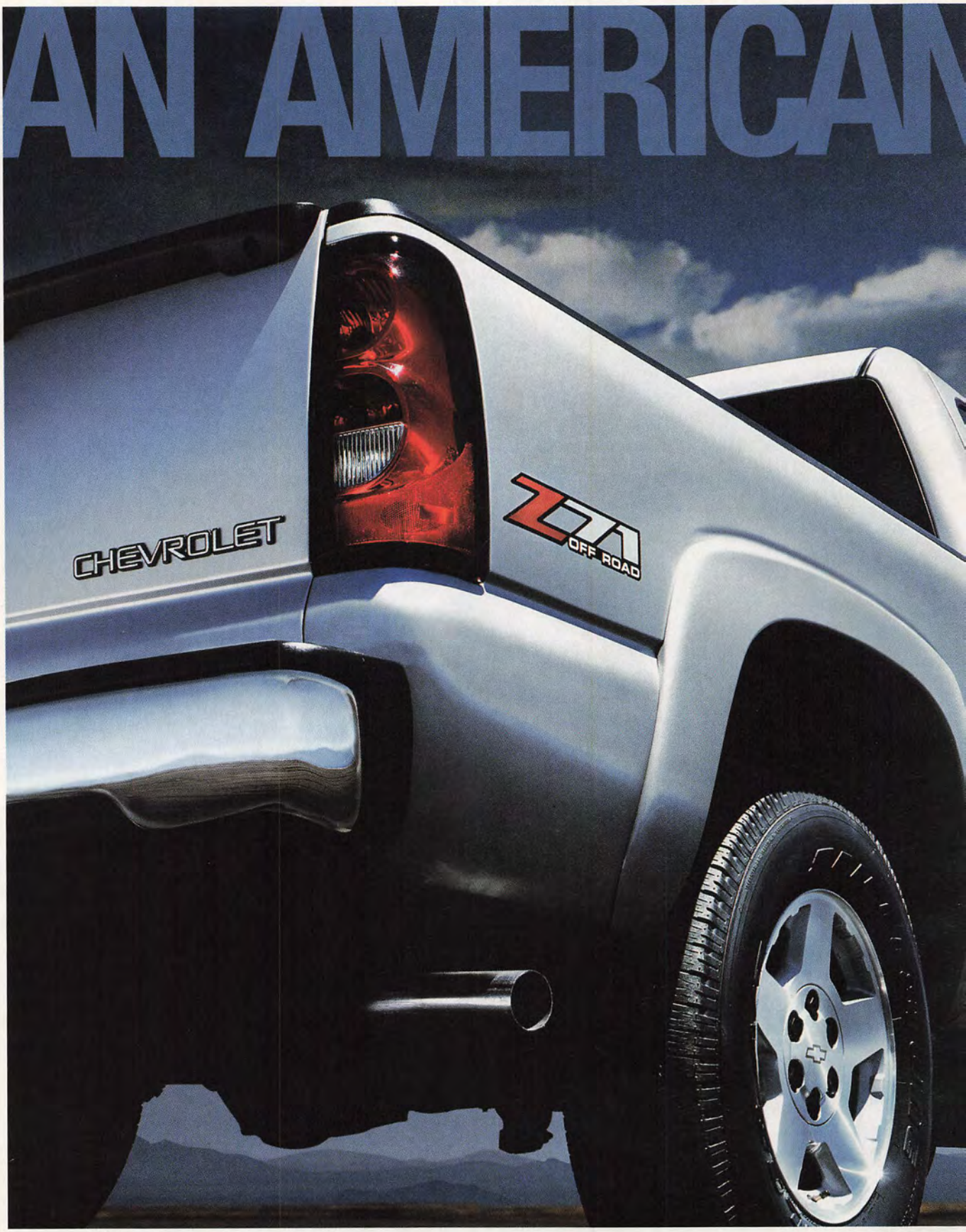

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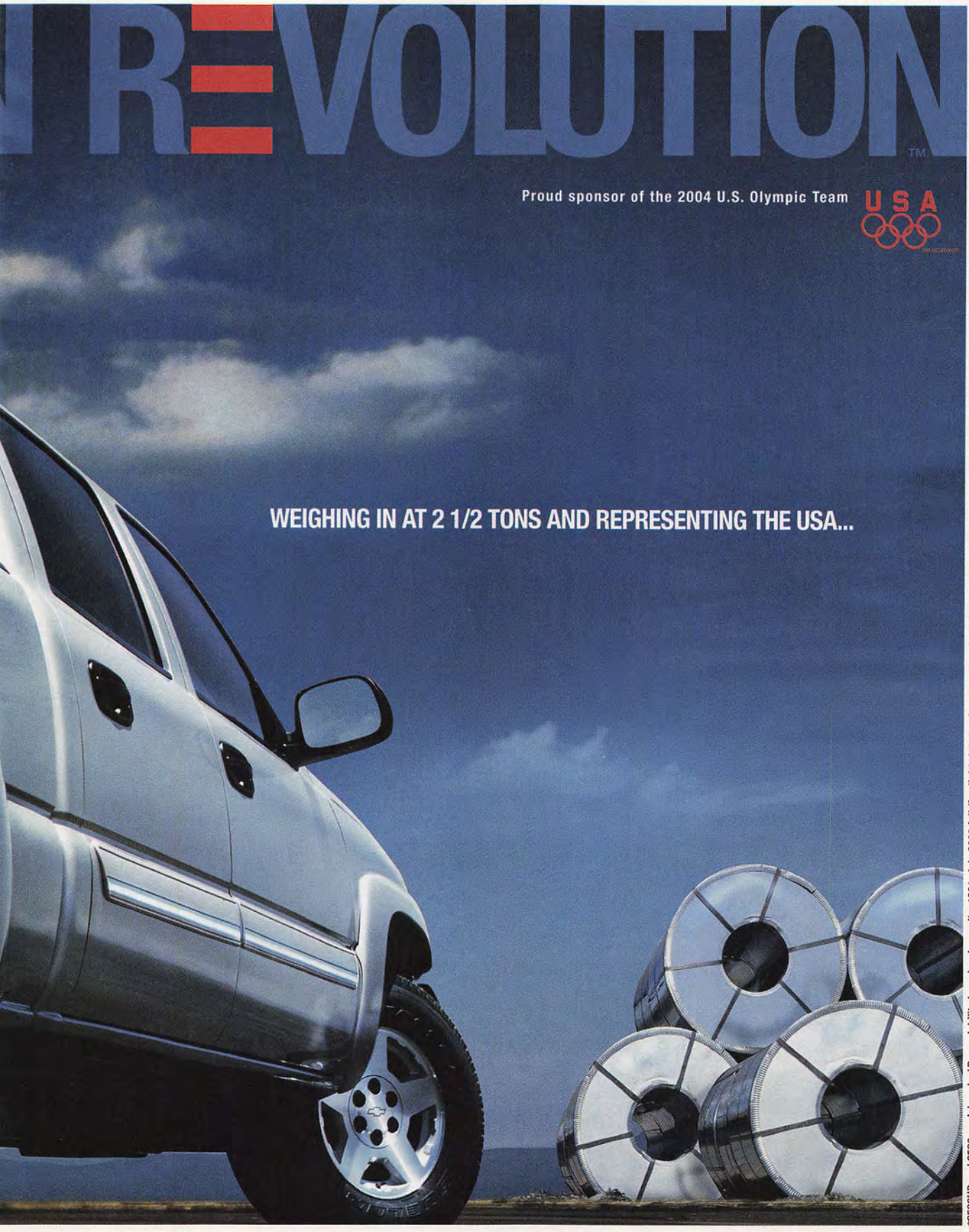

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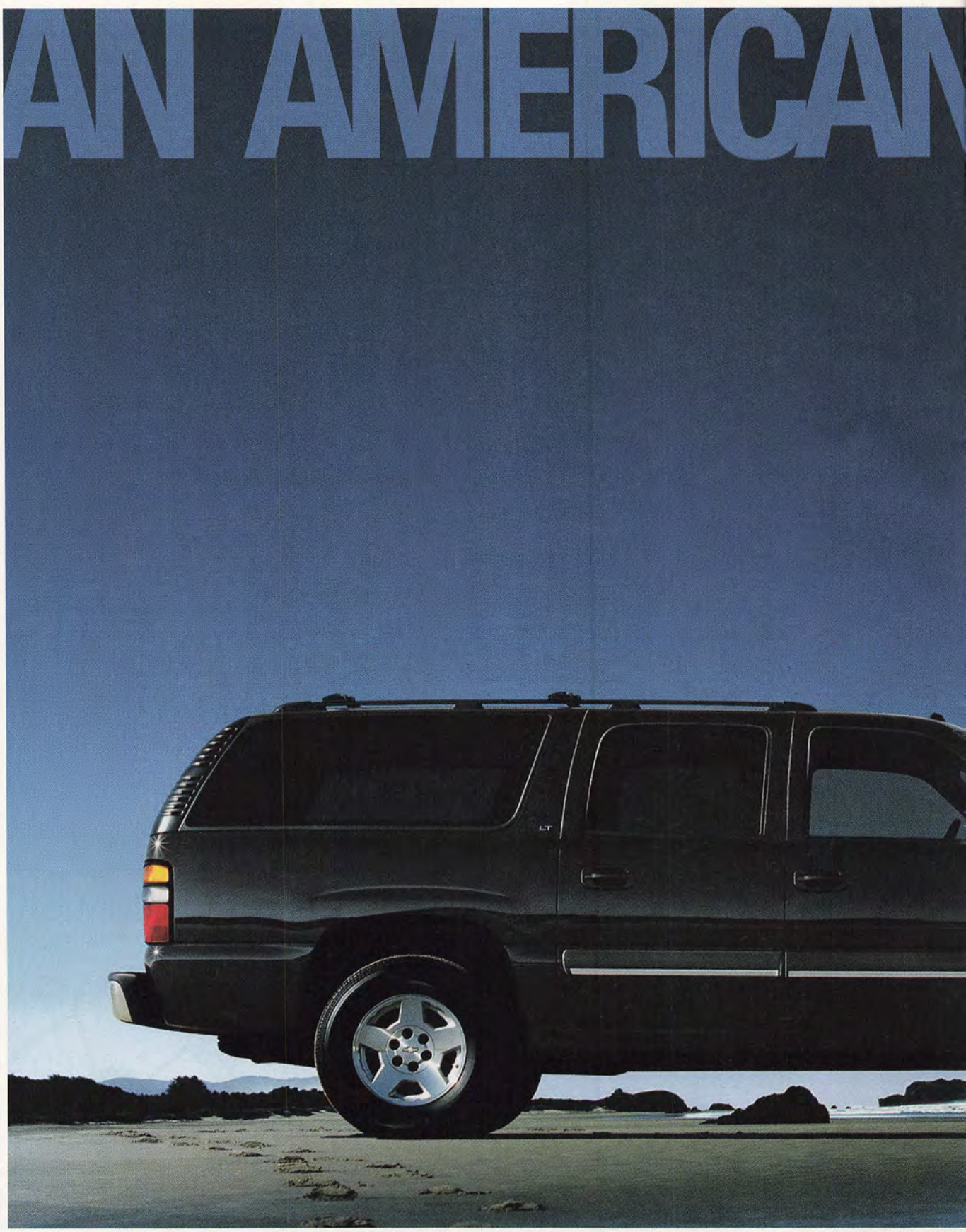

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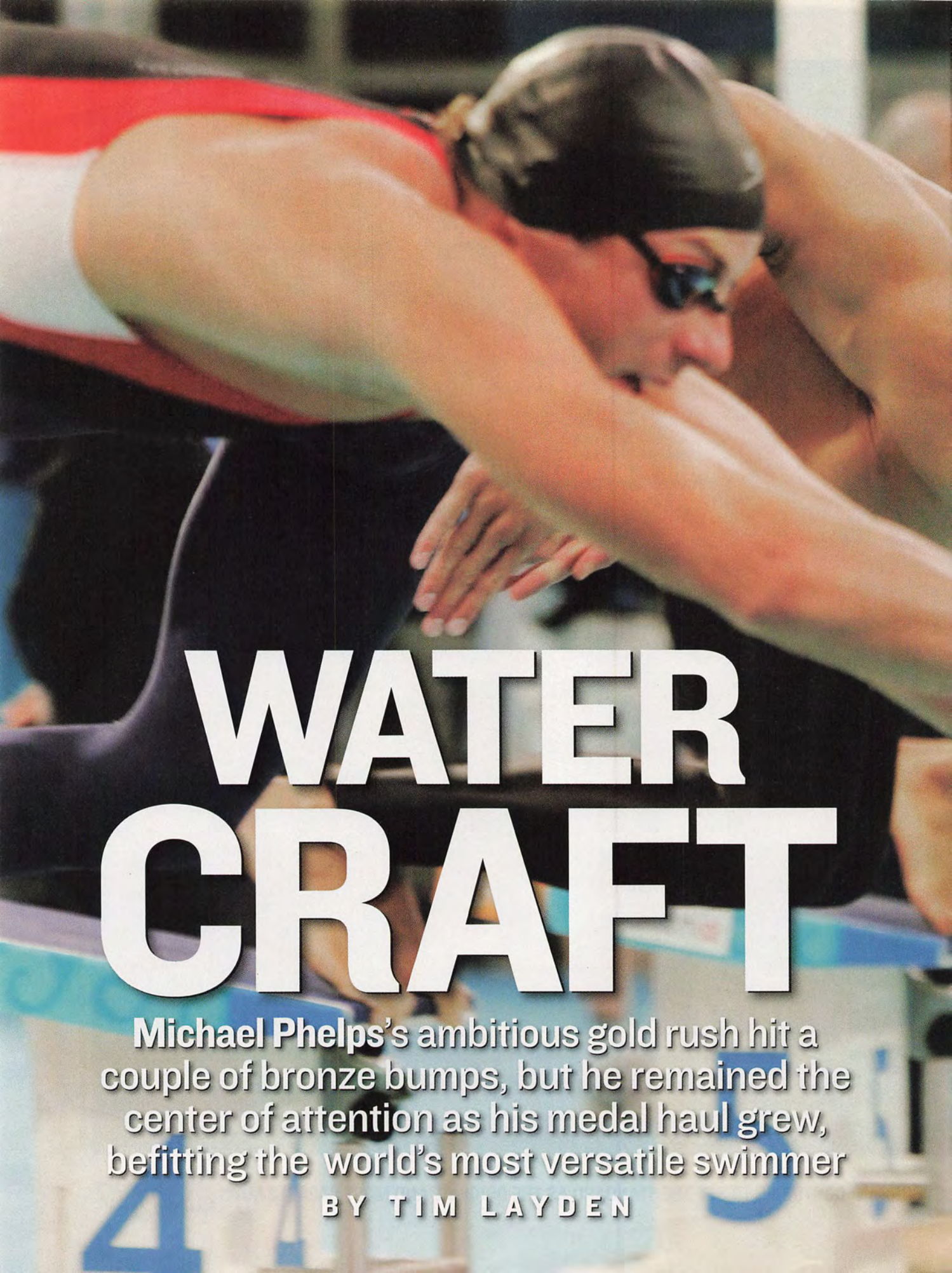


WATER CRAFT

Michael Phelps's ambitious gold rush hit a couple of bronze bumps, but he remained the center of attention as his medal haul grew, befitting the world's most versatile swimmer

BY TIM LAYDEN

SHOWDOWN With his first gold medal already in hand, Phelps made the 200-meter freestyle a personal duel with Australia's Thorpe (yellow cap), but he came up short.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEINZ KLUETMEIER

JUST BEFORE sunset on Monday in Athens, Michael Phelps climbed atop his starting block to swim the final of the 200-meter freestyle. The stadium flags were stretched horizontal in a brisk wind on this third day of the most ambitious Olympics attempted by any swimmer in history. Yet this race was more than just a part of the Phelps package. It was the quest within the quest, an island of personal challenge. Hall of Fame coach Paul Bergen called it "the race of the century," and when that drew chuckles from listeners suspicious of hyperbole, he added, "Really."

In lane 3 was Phelps, 19, the face of these Games. In lane 5 was Ian Thorpe, the Australian national treasure who had been similarly positioned in Sydney four years ago and now, at 21, remained near the top of his form and very much at the peak of eminence in the sport. Between them was defending Olympic champion Pieter Van den Hoogenband, the Dutchman who shocked Thorpe in the Sydney 200 free. Further outside were Grant Hackett, another gifted Aussie, and Klete Keller, another gifted Yank. This was not just the Olympic Games, it was the Fantasy Final of swim races.

Phelps had hurtled toward Athens since making the U.S. Olympic team as a 15-year-old in 2000. In the interim he had broken world records 11 times, won five world championships, established himself as the most versatile swimmer in history and entered eight Olympic events after signing an endorsement deal with Speedo that would pay him $1 million if he could match Mark Spitz's iconic seven gold medals from 1972. As the Games approached, Phelps chafed at the waiting. "I wish the meet started six months ago," he told SI from his room in the Olympic Village on the night of the opening ceremonies. "I feel awesome in the water in training. I need to get in the pool and swim fast *soooo* bad."

He began his mission right on cue with a gold medal—breaking his own world record—in the 400-meter individual medley last Saturday night, and then he added a bronze Sunday night in the 4×100-meter freestyle relay. The 200 free, though, was a unique contest. It was not Phelps's strongest event, yet this was where he could stretch himself to the furthest edges of his talent and swim against Thorpe and Van den Hoogenband on their turf. In the weeks leading to the Olympics, Spitz had questioned why Phelps, in pursuit of gold medals and green money, would swim an event in which victory was unlikely. The answer was simple. "I wanted to race Thorpe in a freestyle before we were both done," said Phelps. (Last summer at the world championships in Barcelona, Phelps beat Thorpe in both the 200- and 400-meter individual medleys, Phelps's strongest races.)

"If this was just about seven gold medals," said Phelps's coach, Bob Bowman, just before the Games opened, "he would have dropped this event. But that's not the goal. The goal is to see what he can do."

Thorpe had played a role in Phelps's development more than two years earlier. Thorpe had broken the world record in the 400 free in 1998, when he was 15 years old, and Bowman had made a tape of that race and played it endlessly for his own adolescent pupil, beseeching him to absorb the smooth power in Thorpe's stroke. "I used that tape as the model for Michael's freestyle stroke," says Bowman. "We spent an awful lot of time watching."

GOLDEN ARCH In the 100-meter backstroke Peirsol won in style.

SIMON BRUTY

Phelps watched more than just Thorpe's stroke. "I remember the first time I saw him on camera, on TV," says Phelps. "He was really good and so poised. The way he presented himself was incredible. I knew I wanted to handle myself just like that."

Each calls the other a friend, but there have been hiccups in the relationship. In spring 2003 Thorpe informally invited Phelps to train with him after learning that Phelps had scheduled a trip to Australia in late fall of that year. However, when Phelps arrived, Thorpe was elsewhere. "I was disappointed," said Phelps in Athens, "but I'm over it now." In December, Thorpe said it was "unattainable" for anyone to win seven gold medals. Phelps responded that perhaps Thorpe meant it was impossible for *him*.

On this night Thorpe reaffirmed his greatness, adding the 200-meter gold medal to the 400-meter gold he took on the first night of the Games. His winning time of 1:44.71 equaled his own third-fastest time in history, as he overhauled Van den Hoogenband in the final 50 meters. Phelps nearly caught the Dutchman as well and took the bronze in 1:45.32, breaking his year-old American record. Phelps came away with an even deeper respect for Thorpe—"It's unbelievable how he moves through the water," Phelps said—but also feeling fulfilled at having pushed himself and unfazed by the fact that the million-dollar bonus for seven golds had gone down the drain. "I was happy to be part of this field and to do my best time," he said. "It was fun."

And his quest would continue. He was the heavy favorite in last Tuesday night's 200-meter butterfly (after SI's press deadline) and later that same night would anchor the U.S.'s 4×200-meter freestyle relay team, which was almost certain to win a medal, with a chance at gold. Three more races remained, as did his chance of becoming the second athlete in history to win eight medals in one Games. Said U.S. teammate Aaron Peirsol, who won a gold medal Monday night in the 100-meter backstroke, "That's the Spitzian accomplishment in our age."

Upon his arrival in Athens, the preternaturally calm Phelps spent most of his time in his room in the Olympic Village watching movies from his collection of more than 40 DVDs on his PS2 console and playing *Madden 2004* with his roommate, graybeard triple-gold-medalist

LOVIN' IT The upbeat Coughlin set an Olympic record in her big splash.

Into the Pool with Pride

Natalie Coughlin showed her colors: gold and silver

CHUCK BOHN CAME to Greece to watch his granddaughter Natalie Coughlin swim in the Olympic Games, and it didn't take long for him to show his true colors. Strolling alone through Syntagma Square just after sunrise on the morning after his arrival in Athens, Bohn happened upon a man wearing a USA T-shirt and said hello. "The guy could barely say 'Good morning' back to me; he spoke no English," Bohn said last Saturday. "Everyone had warned me not to wear my USA gear, but I figured, If that guy's wearing it, I sure as heck will."

Thus Bohn proudly sported a Panama-style hat with a GO USA logo on the front when he showed up at the Olympic Aquatic Center on Saturday evening to watch his granddaughter win her first Olympic medal, a silver in the 4×100-meter freestyle relay. The 67-year-old Bohn, who spent 24 years in the Marine Corps and did three tours in Vietnam, had packed a suitcase full of similarly patriotic garb. "My wife said, 'What are you doing that for?' " he said. "But you know, I've never had to hide who I am, and I don't plan to start now."

Three days into Coughlin's long-awaited Olympic debut, the former Cal swimmer—whose dreams of qualifying for the 2000 Games had been dashed by a severe shoulder injury—had already done plenty to swell American pride. On Monday night she won the first gold medal by an American not named Phelps, racing to victory with a time of 1:00.37 in the 100-meter backstroke, .79 shy of the world record she has held since 2002. That followed Sunday night's semifinals in which she set an Olympic record with a time of 1:00.17 despite a strong northerly wind that made the water unusually choppy. She had also been impressive in the U.S.'s narrow loss to Australia in the 4×100-meter free relay. By contrast, most of her teammates had struggled; through Monday the only other U.S. woman to have won an individual-event medal was USC senior Kaitlin Sandeno, who had turned in personal bests to earn silver in the 400-meter individual medley and bronze in the 400 freestyle.

Though the U.S. had won the 4×100 at the previous three Olympics, all with Jenny Thompson anchoring, the Americans didn't so much lose the relay as Australia snatched it away. In the race's final leg Australian anchor Jodie Henry uncorked an astonishing 52.95-second split to Thompson's 53.77. It was the fastest women's relay split ever and gave the Aussies a world-record time of 3:35.94, while the U.S. settled for an American record of 3:36.39. "It took a world record to get gold," an upbeat Coughlin said after the race. "This was my best relay swim ever. I think it is a good sign."

While Coughlin geared up for an anticipated showdown in Thursday's 100 freestyle against Henry and fellow Australian Libby Lenton, as well as defending Olympic champion Inge de Bruijn of the Netherlands, the 22-year-old Californian was making the most of her experience at the Games. It had already been a proud week for her patriotic grandpa, who, an hour after Saturday's 4×100 race, got choked up as he touched Coughlin's silver medal through a fence separating spectators from the warm-down area. Of course, Bohn had other colors on his mind as well.

"As much as he loves his country," Coughlin said, "there's no amount of international tension that could convince him not to wear red, white and blue." —*Michael Silver*

photograph by Simon Bruty

Lenny Krayzelburg. With his first race scheduled early last Saturday morning, Phelps didn't march in Friday night's opening ceremonies, but he mingled in the Village with athletes who were preparing to participate. "I was just talking with [softball pitcher] Jennie Finch," Phelps said by phone on the night of the ceremonies. "I saw Andy Roddick. The basketball team was there: Iverson, LeBron, Carmelo. Awesome. That gets you ready." He went back to his room and fell asleep before 10 p.m. and less than 24 hours later walked onto the deck of the Olympic pool, headphones strapped over his racing cap, Eminem's *Till I Collapse* filling his ears: *When you feel weak, you feel like you wanna just give up/But you gotta search within you, you gotta find that inner strength/And just pull that s--- out of you. . . .*

It was there that his coolness cracked. He had never felt quite so nervous as he did in the moments before the start of the 400 IM. He swam raggedly, still broke his world record and won by more than three seconds over teammate Erik Vendt, who took the silver, as he had in Sydney.

An hour after the race Phelps's mother, Debbie, caught up with her son. She had raised him as a single mother after getting a divorce when Michael was seven, and mother and son are as close as brother and sister. She, her two daughters and several other relatives were waiting against a fence outside the pool area. When Michael saw her, he walked to the fence, raised his medal and said—as innocently as a child—"Mom, look." Then they all cried together for a moment.

The second medal would be less satisfying. In the 4×100 free relay Ian Crocker, who had been complaining of a sore throat for three days, was nonetheless allowed to swim the leadoff leg by U.S. men's coach Eddie Reese, who also coached Crocker at Texas. Crocker swam a horrific 50.05-second split, leaving the U.S. in last place. Phelps, then Neil Walker, moved the U.S. into third, but they had to settle for the bronze behind South Africa and the Netherlands, the poorest 4×100 finish in Olympic history for the U.S.

There was little time for Phelps to suffer. Forty-one minutes after chasing home Thorpe and Van den Hoogenband, he was called to swim the semifinals of the 200 fly. Phelps knifed into the pool, briefly parting the warm water behind him, chasing more medals that lay in front. □

Wrecking Crews

The powerful men's and women's eights want no less than gold

THE U.S. MEN'S and women's eight-man rowing crews rode strong tailwinds to world records in their qualifying heats on Sunday, building hopes for America's first Olympic sweep of the sport's marquee event. Victories in this Sunday's finals would help erase the memory of a long series of disappointments.

Beginning in 1900 U.S. men won the finals in the eights in 11 of the first 14 Olympics but haven't taken a gold since '64, even though they've won five world titles in the past decade. "Our Olympic winless streak is the unspoken albatross," says Jason Read, the U.S. bow. "We need to change that." The U.S. men trailed Canada, the two-time defending world champion and gold medal favorite, from the start of Sunday's 2,000-meter heat but slipped to the front in the final 200 meters, finishing in 5:19.85. "If we raced Canada a hundred times, it would flip-flop every time," said U.S. coach Mike Teti. "They are a great boat." A month ago Teti replaced half his lineup with members of the U.S. four-man crew that had won a major race in Lucerne, Switzerland, essentially sacrificing one good boat for what he hoped would form a great one.

The women's eight led from start to finish, building a three-second advantage and holding off defending Olympic champion Romania by .22 of a second. "We were catching water [from windblown waves] the whole last 500 meters," said U.S. bow Kate Johnson. "I knew it was part of the Romanians' plan to come on us, but I thought, 'O.K., here they come. Bring it.' "—*Brian Cazeneuve*

photograph by Al Tielemans

BRILLIANT STROKE
The women's eight rowed merrily toward their first gold since '84.

POOL SHARK Azevedo was in perfect condition to score a late game-winner.

Finally, a Happy Ending

For the U.S. water polo team, a brutal training regimen paid off with a last-minute win

AFTER 50 YEARS of failure in the final minutes, the U.S. men's water polo team finally won a game in the last second. In dispatching perennial power Croatia 7–6 on a buzzer-beating shot by Tony Azevedo, the U.S. got a good start on winning its first medal since 1988. For the players it was also evident that their hellish training regimen of the past three years (SI, Aug. 16) was paying off. Under new coach Ratko Rudic, who coached his native Yugoslavia to two Olympic gold medals and Italy to one, the U.S. athletes have endured crushing 11-hour days of swimming, weightlifting and drills that Azevedo estimates is twice the workload of any other team. Asked to describe the last four months, Azevedo said, simply, "Terrible."

Sunday, by contrast, was exhilarating. Croatia, after trailing by three goals for much of the second and third quarters, tied the game at six with 26 seconds remaining. After Azevedo's goal at the buzzer—his third of the game—he still had the strength to pump his fist and scream. After all, it was one of the first international matches the U.S. had played without a grueling practice immediately beforehand. "For the first half I felt like I was walking on water," said U.S. goalie Brandon Brooks. "All of the emotions of the last four years came to the surface." *—Kelli Anderson*

photograph by Peter Read Miller

HI-HO SILVER!

The gold went to Japan, but the U.S. men's gymnastics team, led by the dazzling **Hamm twins**, were thrilled to be on the podium at last

BY E.M. SWIFT

SOME SILVER medals shine more brightly than others. When you've labored in anonymity and the shadow of pixies your entire career, suffering injuries, embarrassment and pain for all your trouble; when it's been 20 years since your country's team has stood on an Olympic podium; when in the 108-year history of the Games the team has never won a medal on foreign soil—well, a thick piece of silver looks pretty good.

That's certainly the way the U.S. men's gymnastics team felt on Monday night, after coming from behind to pass Romania in the final two rotations and win the first men's team medal since the U.S. squad won gold in the Soviet-boycotted Los Angeles Games of 1984. "I don't know who said, 'It stinks to get the silver, because you lost the gold,' " said Blaine Wilson, 30, the inspirational leader of the team, who was competing in his third, and last, Olympics. "But hey, we won the silver."

Any disappointment they might have felt by falling short of their hopes for gold was assuaged by the quality of the team that beat them. Japan was spectacular, dominating the preliminaries on Saturday, then surviving a slow start on Monday to win the gold medal going away. Not only were the Japanese the best team, they may have been the only team hungrier for redemption than the Americans. Japan once owned men's gymnastics, winning five straight team golds from 1960 through '76 before inexplicably becoming a second-tier power. Since 1980 they'd won just three bronze medals and were shut out in Atlanta and Sydney.

"Japan shocked me," said the U.S.'s Paul Hamm, who was the top scorer in the preliminaries and was to compete for the all-around title and four individual apparatus titles. "After watching them in the preliminaries, I thought, How could they be that good?"

Still, the U.S. didn't make it easy for them. In a new finals format implemented this year, each country picked three gymnasts to compete on each apparatus and all three of their scores counted. (In the old format five gymnasts would compete and the low score was thrown out.) The U.S. strategy? Double up on the Hamm. Paul, 21, competed in five of the six events, and his twin brother, Morgan, was in four. The other nine rotations were divided among Wilson, Jason Gatson, Brett McClure and Guard Young.

Turned out there wasn't enough Hamm to go around. After the first two rotations, the floor and the pommel horse, the U.S. had a slim lead over Romania and Japan. Then came the still rings, in which neither twin was entered. The event cost the team a chance at gold, and nearly cost it a medal. Young scored only 9.475 and Gatson, who floated on his iron cross, had a devastating 9.125. Wilson, at least, scored 9.637. The Americans lost .887 to the Japanese on that one rotation. Japan's final margin of victory? .888.

Gatson atoned with a spectacular 9.825 on the parallel bars, the highest score for the U.S. all night. Then, in the final rotation, Romania's Razvan Dorin Selariu fell off the high bar and his team plunged from first to third. The U.S. had its silver—the same color the men had won at the last two world championships, in 2001 and '03. "For so long other countries counted us out," said Paul Hamm, who made a silver-saving recovery near the end of his high-bar routine after his right hand slipped off the bar following one of his release moves. "But after what we've done at the last two worlds, and now the Olympics, they're going to have to worry about us."

Certainly as long as the Hamms are competing, the rest of the world will have to worry, which means for at least four more years. Beyond that, it would be a stretch to say U.S. men's gymnastics has turned a corner permanently. Without the twins, the U.S. is a fifth-place team, which is where it finished in the last two Olympics. The Hamms, it appears, are to U.S. gymnastics what the Mahre brothers were to U.S. skiing in the 1980s, the leaders of a brief run of success in a major Olympic sport. But it sure is sweet while it lasts. □

PARALLEL STAR Paul Hamm competed in five events on Monday night to vault the U.S. team to glory, and perhaps prime himself for individual gold.

Undercover Games

▶ In case you were wondering why some of the athletes and officials marching in the Parade of Nations looked so somber last Friday night, the answer is that as many as 300 of them actually were undercover security officers. "We were soaking in the moment," one U.S. athlete said, "and we had two security guys soaking in everything else. It's sad that it has come to that, but I'm glad they're here." —*Don Yaeger*

Uplifting Farewell

▶ Limping and out of medal contention after the falling barbell on her second lift struck her left leg, **Tara Cunningham** *(inset)* could have passed on her final lift, a clean and jerk of 95 kilograms (about 209 pounds), and no one would have blamed her. But Cunningham, 32, who was known as Tara Nott in 2000 when she became the first American in 40 years to win a weightlifting gold, never considered quitting last Saturday at Nikaia Weightlifting Hall. She made the lift to close out her international career with an 11th-place finish in the 106-pound division.

JOHN LYNN/AP

"The Olympics are about walking away knowing you gave your absolute best on that given night," said Cunningham, fighting back tears. "That's how I feel."

As Cunningham gathered her gear and prepared to leave, two of her teammates, women's heavyweight **Cheryl Haworth** and men's heavyweight **Shane Hamman**, came by to give her some love. Haworth wrapped the 5' 1" Cunningham in a bear hug, and Hamman, who could lift 95 kilos with one hand, shook his head in wonder at Cunningham's final effort. "Getting that 95, Tara, man, that was awesome," he said. "Truly awesome."

Sometimes there's pure gold in 11th place. —*Jack McCallum*

MAX ROSSI/REUTERS

Volley Girls

Beach volleyball shakes up its show

JUST IN CASE anybody failed to pick up on that sun-fun-and-buns vibe from the last two Olympics, beach volleyball now features a 12-babe dance team. This is the kind of progress that will make this sport the Games' first pay-per-view event, especially if the babes continue to shake as excitedly as they have in Athens, where the term *side-out* finally has meaning.

Now in its third Games, beach volleyball was always intended as a sensory smorgasbord, of course, but it now sometimes seems as if the actual playing of the game (and the attendant possibility of boredom) is permitted only out of necessity. The addition of dancers may not be an unfortunate development, oglement-wise, but it's not particularly needed. Last Saturday, in first-round action, 2000 gold medalist Natalie Cook of Australia was gutting it out with a torn rotator cuff, diving and spiking with enough abandon to make you wince in shared pain, even with the balm of the choreography of the baked dozen. It's a pretty good game, even without a dance team, is what we're saying.

Not that there's anything wrong with a dance team. —*Richard Hoffer*

photograph by Al Tielemans

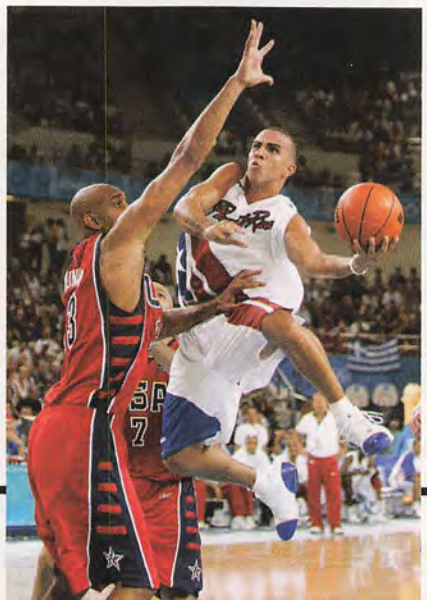
THE BOTTOM LINE The baked dozen (left) cast a visible shadow over the superb play of such athletes as the U.S.'s Holly McPeak.

BAD DREAM

While getting spanked by Puerto Rico in its first game, the U.S. basketball team played like an NBA team—the Clippers—and the Americans' nightmare in Athens may have just begun

BY JACK McCALLUM

TURNS OUT we had the wrong take on this U.S. men's basketball team. It's not that the team isn't great; it's that it's not even very good. That is the only logical conclusion following Sunday night's 92–73 loss to Puerto Rico in the teams' opening game. It was America's first Olympic defeat in basketball since NBA players signed on in 1992, and the worst U.S. moment in international hoops since Bob Knight's dustup with a Puerto Rican policeman at the '79 Pan Am Games. ¶ The U.S. defended like a high school team, allowing Puerto Rico to dominate in transition and with its energetic motion offense, and shot like a junior high team, making three of 24 three-point shots from beyond a line that is more than three feet closer to the basket than the NBA's line. The Americans did, however, generally comport themselves like an NBA team—a bad one—which means it came out uninterested, failed to respond to the challenge quickly, then panicked with egregious shot selection and sloppy ball management (22 turnovers compared with only 26 field goals). The one bright spot was LeBron James's scholastic acuity.



AFRAID TO LOOK James (left) and his teammates were shredded by guard Carlos Arroyo, who scored 24 points.

"Some Americans might say this is embarrassing, losing to Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States," he said. Actually, LeBron, *all* of our citizens would say that.

Forget all that talk about this team's bringing home the gold—now it's about survival. To get to the medal round after four more preliminary round-robin games, which end on Aug. 23, the U.S. must be among the top four teams in its six-team Group B, the weaker of the two groups, the one that does not include Argentina, Serbia-Montenegro or Spain.

Can these U.S. players (whose second game was against Greece on Tuesday night) respond? Possibly. Unless it's brain-dead, the team *should* be able to make an attitude adjustment and start taking its competition in Athens seriously. Tim Duncan, selfless to a fault, *should* realize that he's got to bull his way to the basket even when he's quadruple-teamed. (Of course, someone needs to pass him the ball so he can do that.) Coach Larry Brown *should* see that he's got to use Dwyane Wade, a bulldog defender, more and Shawn Marion, hopelessly lost in the international format, less. But the team's

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB ROSATO

biggest technical problem remains how to control a game defensively when it shoots so poorly. A team can't set up a pressure defense if it is constantly scrambling to get back in transition after missed shots. On Sunday, Marion and Wade shot air balls, Richard Jefferson clanged one off the side of the backboard, and one of Carmelo Anthony's line drives got wedged between the rim and the backboard. (It's fortunate these guys are not representing the U.S. in archery.)

Even if the U.S. pulls out of this nosedive, the big question will be: What did coach Larry Brown *(inset)* know and when did he know it? Brown says he stayed out of the personnel decisions made by USA Basketball's selection committee; a committeeman says that while Brown is not a voting member, "the idea that he wouldn't have input is ridiculous."

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

At any rate, after all the no-thank-you RSVPs (from, to mention a few, Ray Allen, Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, Jason Kidd, Tracy McGrady and Shaquille O'Neal) started rolling in, Brown was left with a team bereft of outside shooters and sated with brick-laying small forwards. Conspiracists would suggest that James, Anthony and rookie-to-be Emeka Okafor were chosen for their marketability, and right now there's not anyone associated with the U.S. team who wouldn't replace Marion, Okafor and Amare Stoudemire with, say, Chauncey Billups, Fred Hoiberg and James Posey.

Then, too, though Brown has said it's nice that some of the NBA's younger players are getting a chance to represent their country in these Olympics, he is clearly peeved that some of his callow crew (Anthony and Stoudemire, in particular) have not bought into the game plan. "A lot of these young kids didn't realize that in order to be part of the team, you're going to have to sacrifice a lot of your individual things," said Brown after the loss to Puerto Rico.

That the U.S. would lose in these Games is not shocking, but it was not supposed to be so early and by such a large margin. "It could be a happy ending if we keep fighting and use this as a learning experience," said Allen Iverson. It will be something else entirely if they don't. □

Bench Marks

Diana Taurasi isn't used to being a sub. No problem

DIANA TAURASI SAYS she hasn't been a second-stringer since she was "the backup backstroker on my second-grade swim team," but the WNBA rookie made a splash coming off the bench in the U.S. women's team's 99–47 opening-game blowout of New Zealand. Taurasi, a first-time Olympian and, at 22, the youngest team member by two years, hit two threes within three minutes of checking in and finished with 12 points, a team-high nine rebounds, one assist, a steal and a block in 22 minutes. On a team loaded with other WNBA stars, Taurasi—arguably the most high-profile player in the sport, thanks to her extraordinary college career at Connecticut—is likely to remain a sub, but she has impressed her teammates with her talent and gritty attitude and is clearly an Olympic star of the future. Upon leaving the court against the Kiwis, she got a high five from a very pleased U.S. coach, Van Chancellor. "It's a different country, different officials, different rules, different court, different ball," Taurasi said afterward, "but for me, it's still a basketball game, no matter where you play." —K.A.

photograph by Al Tielemans

SUBLIME Taurasi filled the stat sheet in just 22 minutes of action.

UNTOUCHABLE
Finch blew away the Italians in the opener with three hitless innings.

Brilliant, but Bittersweet

Three shutout wins can't erase a lingering sense of loss

WHEN TEAM USA softball coach Mike Candrea rubs his wedding ring, he is not putting on the bunt sign. He is, in his way, communicating with his wife, Sue, who died suddenly last month while traveling with the team. While in the dugout Candrea is immersed in the game, but when he leaves the field, his wife never leaves his thoughts. The den mother to his players both at the University of Arizona and in the Olympic program, Sue, 49, collapsed from a brain aneurysm in a Wisconsin airport near the end of the team's pre-Olympic trip, the one in which it stormed to a 53–0 record as if every opponent were the Washington Generals. She died two days later, on July 18.

Suddenly, strangely, there is a chasm in the soul of this spiritual man, yet not a single hole on his team. The U.S. squad can win with its speed (shortstop and leadoff hitter Natasha Watley was batting .600 through three games), with its brute power (in a 10–0 shutout of Australia on Sunday, catcher Stacey Nuveman crushed a three-run homer to center into a 29-mph wind) or with its brilliant pitching staff headed by aces Lisa Fernandez (who one-hit the Aussies) and Jennie Finch (who pitched three innings of hitless ball in a 7–0 win against Italy a day earlier). "We can score on home runs, and we can score even when the ball never leaves the infield," says Fernandez, who fanned 25 Australians in a memorable 13-inning loss in 2000 but got 15 outs without a single strikeout in her shutout last week.

Even in victory, however, Candrea's mind was on his loss. After the defeat of Australia, he walked to a fence to greet his children, Mikel, 24, and Michelle, 21. "It was tough to see my son and daughter after the game," he said. "There was a missing piece of a puzzle." —*Michael Farber*

photographs by John W. McDonough

It's Greek to Them

► In its first Olympic baseball game ever, Hellas, as the blue script on Greece's classic if not classical white uniforms proclaimed, scratched out two singles, made two errors and lost 11–0 on Sunday to the Netherlands—not that the crowd of 5,009 seemed to mind. The fans cheered every play by the jerry-built team (one native Greek, 22 Americans with Greek heritage) inspired and supported by Baltimore Orioles owner **Peter Angelos**.

"The first pitch I threw was a ball, and they were cheering, and I got confused," said starting pitcher **Clint Zavaras**, 37, a former major leaguer who has been out of professional baseball for 10 years. "I had to check the scoreboard to make sure it wasn't a strike." —M.F.

Mountain of Youth

► **Yi Jianlian**'s age is a mystery, even to his teammates on China's basketball squad. "He is 16, you say?" asks **Yao Ming**, the team's star center. "I thought he was 17." Some think Yi *(inset, 11, with Yao)* could be as old as 22, but he is listed by the Chinese Olympic Committee as 16 and is thought to be the youngest hoops Olympian in history. Whatever his age, the 6' 11" Yi has come a long way quickly; a reserve for most of the season on his club team in Guangdong province, he played 14 minutes at forward in China's opening game on Sunday, an 83–58 loss to Spain.

Yi doesn't have a clue about passing or dribbling on the move, but he has a deft shooting touch and he's an exceptional athlete with quickness and fluidity. He also has a deferential attitude—in effect, no 'tude—passing up shots and looking to set screens even against zones.

"He becomes draft-eligible in two years," says China coach **Del Harris**, a Dallas Mavericks assistant, "and he *will* be drafted." Of course, if it's discovered that Yi is already old enough to be eligible, he'll be drafted in 2005. —J.M.

Inside Dope

Bookies with the Antigua-based site WagerOnSports.com have posted odds not only on Olympic events but also on which country would be the first caught up in a drug scandal. The favorite was China, at 5–1, but off-the-board Kenya earned the dishonor when boxer **David Munyasia** tested positive for a stimulant. (Kenya has appealed.) —D.Y.

Quick Work

▸ Last Saturday a 5' 5", 132-pound ball of aggression named **Tadahiro Nomura** *(inset)* became the first three-time Olympic judo champion—yet was overshadowed by a Japanese teammate. Nomura, 29, needed only nine minutes of a potential 25 to storm to gold, winning three of his five matches in a combined 90 seconds en route to the final.

Even though Nomura had made history and won Japan's 100th Olympic gold medal ever, the second career gold and fourth overall medal earned by **Ryoko Tani** made bigger news back home. Tani, 28, is her nation's darling, a 106-pound windup toy who's nicknamed Yawara-chan after a comic-book doppelgänger who is a judoka. Ryoko also is married to **Yoshitomo Tani**, an outfielder for the Orix BlueWave, **Ichiro Suzuki**'s old team; their December 2003 wedding was nationally televised.

JOHN BIEVER

—M.F.

Here to Maternity

▸ Because of construction delays, some reporters and USOC officials have been put up in a maternity hospital near the Olympic Stadium. That's no hardship: The rooms are spotless, there's a florist in the lobby and the beds are adjustable (and have safety railings). "The best thing," says one guest, *Boston Globe* columnist Bob Ryan, "is there's always a nurse on duty right outside your door." —M.F.

Two Good

In synchronized diving the Chinese still rule the pool

JOHN BIEVER

AFTER THEIR MIRROR-IMAGE dives in the women's three-meter springboard event, Wu Minxia and Guo Jingjing, matched in slight build and height, emerged from the water and bowed to the audience—in sync, of course. China quickly established its dominance in the opening days of diving, winning every synchronized event except the men's springboard, in which leaders Peng Bo and Wang Kenan blew their final dive. That mistake enabled the Greek duo of Nikolaos Siranis and Thomas Bimis to win their country's first gold medal of the Games.

Though China continues to choose young diving prospects and train them at state sport schools ("They learn the best techniques right away," said Australian bronze medalist Chantelle Newbery, "whereas we start when we're 12 for fun, learn a few bad habits and spend a lot of time trying to get rid of them"), the ones who reach the Olympics are becoming more Westernized. The two biggest stars, Guo, 22, and men's 10-meter platform gold medalist Tian Liang, 24, still live in dormitories with 6 a.m. reveille and 10 p.m. lights out and nine hours of training in between, but they are well rewarded. In China, Guo and Tian are heroes with endorsement deals from multinational companies. And they're such celebrities that their countrymen are abuzz over a rumor that the divers will neither confirm nor deny: that they're a couple. —K.A.

photograph by Bob Martin

YOU GUO, GIRLS Wu and Guo (right) were perfectly suited to each other in Athens, but crowd favorites Siranis (inset, right) and Bimis made the biggest splash.

The Contenders?

▸ The boxing venue is, alone among the mostly magnificent Olympic architecture, nondescript and well off the beaten path. This, of course, is the controlling metaphor for the U.S. program, which failed to produce a single gold medal in 2000 and isn't expected to win much this time either. But the team got off to a good start in the first three days with wins by 20-year-old middleweight **Andre Dirrell** *(inset)*, welterweight **Vanes Martirosyane**, 18, and lightweight **Vincente Escobedo**, 22. Coach Basheer Abdullah was confident about his boxers' chances. "I might know something you don't," he suggested.

RICK BOWMER/AP

He says that his boxers are trained for specific opponents and styles, the way the Cubans and the Russians have always been.

Certainly they have enthusiasm. Team members asked to rearrange their workouts to attend Dirrell's bout, which suggests a camaraderie absent for too long. Perhaps they know something we don't, too. —R.H.

The View from Here

▸ While the Games might have begun with a few letdowns—the hoops fiasco, Michael Phelps's losses, the acres of empty seats—one pleasant surprise has been NBC's exhaustive coverage. In contrast to previous years, the network has scaled back the mawkish profiles in favor of actual competition. The reheated telecasts are an annoyance (if an inevitable one), but by spreading out events on partner cable networks CNBC, MSNBC, Bravo, Telemundo and USA, NBC is providing satisfying fare.

Viewer reaction has been positive. For the first three nights of the Games, NBC says, the total number of viewers across all networks was up 11% from Sydney. And Sunday's prime-time NBC menu of women's gymnastics and swimming drew an overnight average 15.4 rating/26 share, a 5% jump.

—L. Jon Wertheim

Village People

Good food, bad movies—the athletes' colossal compound has it all

AFTER POLISHING OFF an e-mail at an overflowing Internet center in the Olympic Village last Thursday, U.S. taekwondo fighter Steven Lopez turned to his brother and coach, Jean, and said, "So where do we go from here?" That's a tough call each day for the 10,500 athletes and 5,500 officials living in the largest village ever built for a Games—366 buildings covering 306 acres. U.S. softball players bought out one store's supply of scooters to get around in the village, which is 22 miles north of downtown Athens and includes a bank, post office, religious center, library, souvenir store, open-air cinema (featuring, among other flicks, *The Missing* and *Anger Management*) and 5,000-seat dining hall. In the dining hall American athletes are recognizable as the ones seemingly always carrying trays of McDonald's burgers past food stations offering Asian, Greek and other international fare. "People are calling that the walk of shame because of those of us who pass up all the great food," says U.S. canoeist Joe Jacobi.

Cuban athletes have hung banners over the balconies of their dormitories in which Fidel Castro is depicted playing chess as both a young and an old man. Athletes from New Zealand created a lounge they call Mother Earth, complete with sculptures and indoor gardens. The Australians, apparently dismayed by the dirt path fronting the doorway to their quarters, purchased mulch and built a garden. The British team brought with them a golf cart psychedelically decorated to resemble a vehicle in an Austin Powers film. At the base of the International Zone, a meeting and pin-trading point for many athletes, Aguida Amaral, a marathoner from East Timor, stared last week at a row of 202 flags lining a giant walkway. "That is the best part for me," said Amaral, whose country is making its first appearance in the Games as an independent nation. "I am happy because I see all the flags from the other countries, and now I can see my flag." —B.C.

photograph by Lynn Johnson

THE BUZZ In the vast and humming Olympic Village, a trim was just one option open to Lopez and the 10,500 athlete-inhabitants. (The lucky ones found scooters.)

PEACE OF MIND
Thoughts of war never far away, Emad Mohammed (7) and his Iraqi teammates felt only joy after the upset of Portugal.

Iraq on a Roll

Two improbable soccer wins raised spirits and worked as a salve for past pain and future uncertainty

THE CHEERS WERE still ringing in Iraqi striker Younis Mahmoud's ears long after he escaped the blessed chaos at Karaiskaki Stadium on Sunday. For two hours, more than 4,000 Iraqi soccer fans had grown increasingly delirious, rushing the field by the dozen after each goal, unleashing a warlike whoop that had nothing to do with any war: "Iraq! Iraq! With our blood and soul, Iraq!" Their team had qualified for the Olympic quarterfinals, beating Costa Rica 2–0 after upsetting gold medal contender Portugal 4–2. "There have been so many problems in Iraq, but now we can give something simple to my people," Mahmoud said. "I wish I was there right now to see them."

There are thousands of Iraqi exiles in Greece, and flag-waving expats took over the stadium on Sunday. Their unbridled joy was set free by players who had endured torture at the hands of Uday Hussein, who ran the Iraqi Olympic Committee for his father, Saddam (SI, March 24, 2003), from 1994 until last year's U.S.-led invasion. "I'm so proud to be an Iraqi tonight," said Bisoyn Najah, 39, who drove a tank in the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to '88 and fled to Athens 10 years ago. His friend Albert Yalda, a 40-year-old Iraqi-born Canadian, couldn't contain himself: "This may be the happiest day of my life."

For a moment Iraqis everywhere could unite behind a triumphant national team composed of Shiites, Sunnis and a single Kurd—midfielder Hawar Mulla Mohammed, who scored against Costa Rica. What's more, Iraq had a home-crowd environment unlike any they had enjoyed since before the invasion. (The National Stadium in Baghdad is closed to the public, forcing Iraq to play its "home" games in Amman, Jordan, 500 miles away.) Frustrated by their nation's instability, the Iraqis played in Greece as though they'd been liberated, beating their more highly regarded foes with speed and marvelous combination passes.

The Iraqis may be on their way to the most unlikely of Olympic medals. "That is our wish," Mahmoud said. "We think anything is possible." —*Grant Wahl*

photograph by Niviere/DPPI/SIPA

AMERICAN GRAFFITI

In an ambivalent Athens one message is clear: At these Games restraint could be as precious as gold for the U.S. and its athletes

BY S.L. PRICE

LAST FRIDAY, on a corner in central Athens near historic Panathinaiko Stadium, a statue stood ignored. In a city all but demanding comparisons between its bone-white marble masterworks and the modern athletes flooding the streets, who had time for a giant Harry Truman sporting spectacles and a double-breasted suit? Truman was many things—U.S. president, staunch anti-Communist and, in today's Athens, the handiest symbol of American power—but no one ever called him Olympian. Still, few things better embody the hard, cool world that greeted American athletes when the 2004 Summer Olympics began than this embattled monument. During the U.S.-led bombing of Kosovo in 1999 a protesting crowd tore down Harry and left only his shoes behind. In 2003 a protesting crowd wrapped his restored form in brown paper, scrawled with the words, RETURN TO SENDER. For years, a 24-hour guard kept watch over the dinged metal and scarred stone. ¶ Now, though, Harry needed no such protection.

An enormous delegation of real Americans had come to town, and instantly found themselves under a subtle kind of siege. Even as they were welcomed and coddled by Greek officials and volunteers, U.S. Olympic team officials, coaches, athletes and fans were served a steady diet of sometimes justified, sometimes absurd criticism. If they weren't reading stories slamming the U.S. for failing to observe the Olympic Truce, they were being accused of doping crimes or hearing reminders of their over-the-top celebrations at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. No American team has ever opened a Games amid such sneers. F--- THE USA reads the graffiti across the street from the U.S. embassy (with a swastika replacing the S). FAT HAPPY AMERICANS reads the message stenciled on walls all over the city, punctuated by the chilling image of a torture victim from Abu Ghraib prison.

BOB MARTIN

TRUMAN SHOW The statue of the former U.S. president known for his hardline foreign policy is a frequent target of protesters.

Things have reached such a sorry state that, on the morning of Opening Ceremonies, the U.S. was somehow being blamed for the most humiliating moment in the history of modern Greek sports. Thursday night, just as organizers and politicians began reveling in due praise for getting the city ready in time, sprinters Konstantinos Kenteris and Katerina Thanou, winners, respectively, of the 200-meter gold and 100-meter silver in Sydney, missed a mandatory drug test (for the second time in 16 months), all but confirming longstanding suspicions. Facing near-certain expulsion from the competition they had expected to dominate, both entered the hospital after a motorcycle accident—apparently witnessed by no one—

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with minor injuries and no public statement, in the process indicting themselves, their coach, Christos Tzekos, and a Greek track federation long intimidated by its two stars.

The resulting national uproar followed the usual pattern of shock, outrage and a call for wholesale firings. But there was also one uniquely Greek wrinkle: The Americans were responsible for this mess too. Friday morning's mainstream newspapers stated flatly—and without sourcing—that the U.S. team, led by chief executive Jim Scherr, had threatened on Aug. 11 to pull out of the Games unless the IOC tested the two Greek sprinters. To see such illogic in action was breathtaking: U.S. officials, it seems, would risk worldwide contempt and endless lawsuits, destroy Michael Phelps's gold medal quest and the dreams of 537 others, if only to sabotage Greece's already-suspect heroes. Scherr calls the claim "utterly ridiculous" and, though the U.S. has a history of finger-pointing, denies that anyone from the USOC contacted the IOC or the World Anti-Doping Agency about the sprinters. "We have our own problems with drug-testing," Scherr says. "We have done nothing in any way instructing or pressuring the IOC or WADA in that regard."

If you didn't know anything about Greek politics or culture, all this would come off as supremely bizarre. But in Greece, according to Nikos Konstanderas, editor of the respected newspaper *Kathimerini*, anti-Americanism has become overwhelming. Polls of Greek citizens regularly put opposition to American foreign policy at about 95%, and the odds are that nearly every smiling, hospitable Greek harbors at least some vague suspicion about American motives. Until recently, many Greeks thought their election results were dictated by the CIA, and it wasn't hard to find people convinced that the agency pulled the strings of the terror group November 17. Nikos Polias, Greece's top marathoner, believes that President Bush knew of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks beforehand and used them as a pretext for a war for oil. Out of 10 of his friends, Polias was asked, how many feel that way? "Eight," he says. "Maybe 10."

Not that the Greeks don't come by their paranoia honestly. Polias and his friends grew up in the shadow of a brutal, anti-Communist military junta, known as the Colonels, that from 1967 to '74 ran a pariah regime with the support of the U.S. In 1971, Vice President Spiro Agnew became the first Western leader to visit Greece since the Colonels (reportedly six-figure contributors to the '68 Nixon-Agnew campaign) took over, backing them with declarations of "renewed respect." A 1999 apology by President Bill Clinton for such antics did little to dispel Greek mistrust. No surprise, then, that local criticism of Tzekos, who spent his 20s selling vitamin supplements in the Chicago area, had centered on his slick suits, secrecy and American attitude. "It makes me think better, being in the States," Tzekos said last year. "Open to ideas about nutrition, about supplements, about how we have to think to be big."

But being big and American has its price. On Saturday the Greek Olympic Committee put on a meaningless show of strength, voting to boot Kenteris, Thanou and Tzekos out of the Games, but leaving their final fate to the IOC disciplinary board on Wednesday. Whatever the result, the damage is done; even Greek President Costis Stephanopoulos is calling the imbroglio "a disgrace."

The USOC has no room to gloat: More than two dozen U.S. athletes (not to mention two Americans who were to have played for the Greek baseball team) have either flunked drug tests or been implicated in drug scandals over the last year. For its perceived hypocrisy on that issue and for reasons having nothing to do with athletic competition, the U.S. has replaced the Soviet Union and East Germany as the sporting empire the world most loves to hate. Long accustomed to wearing the white hat, American athletes prepared for Athens under unprecedented pressure from politicians and team officials to restrain themselves: no untoward flag-waving, no provocative celebrations. Olympic stars Janet Evans and Bob Beamon crisscrossed the country in July and August, showing video lowlights of how not to act: swimmer Amy Van Dyken's spitting in her opponent's lane in 2000, the 4×100 men's relay team's preening after winning the gold in Sydney.

"The main thing we said is, 'Be yourself. But if you do what Amy Van Dyken did, the repercussions will be tenfold. You will look like the Ugly American,'" Evans says. "Everyone's watching us."

Scherr has set a U.S. goal of winning at least 100 medals in Athens, "but my greater hope is that the team brings pride and restores some of the honor to our athletes and how they're viewed on the field of play."

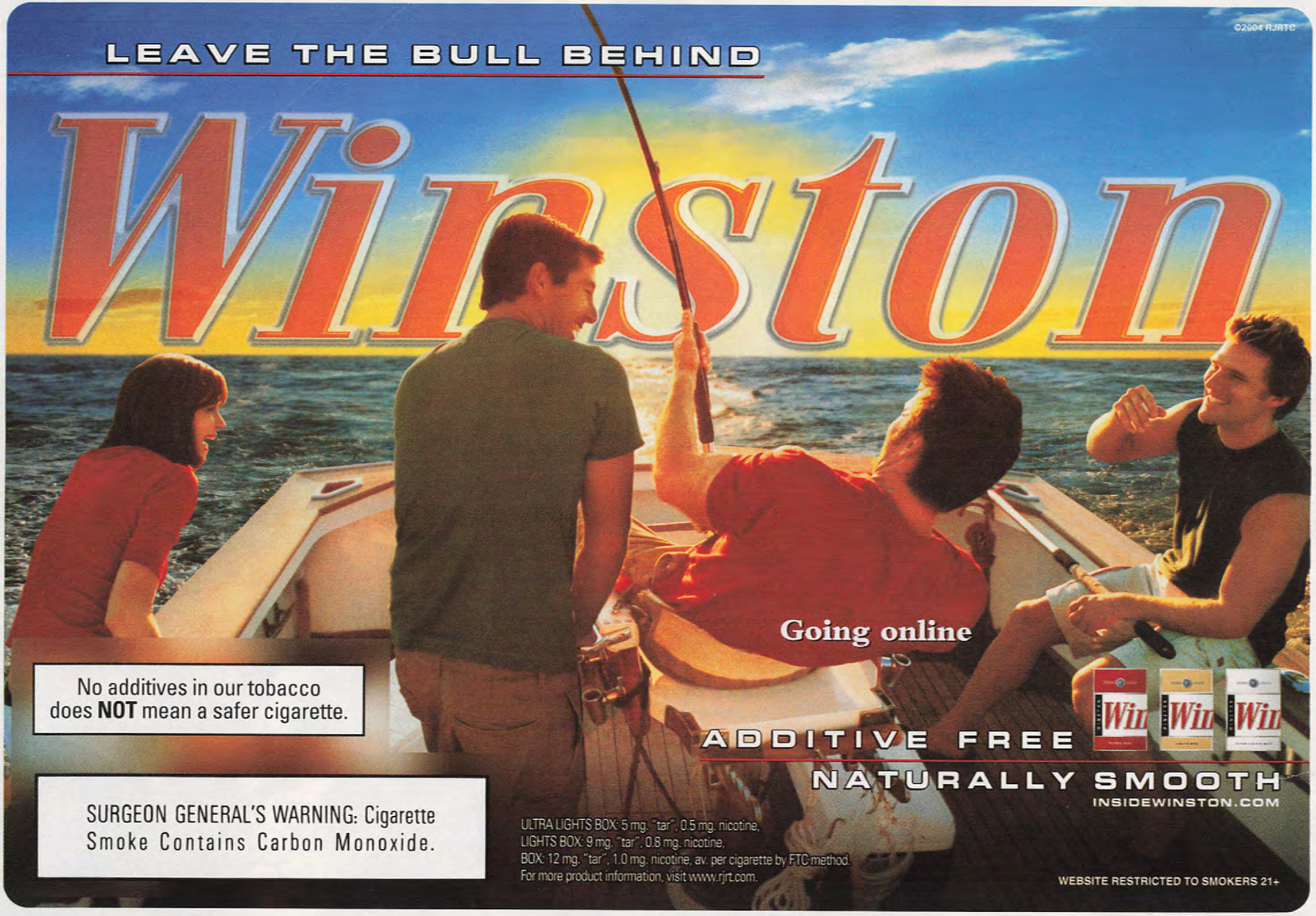
With all that in mind, the U.S. team headed to the opening ceremonies with no idea what to expect. "We didn't know whether there would be boos or applause," said canoe and kayak team member Brett Heyl.

A bit of both. The fans responded with polite clapping and a smattering of catcalls, which, when you take into account the a la carte nature of attitudes toward America, is no surprise. The same person deriding a Starbucks on the Champs Élysées will likely as not profess admiration for American innovation or education. And if the Greeks present Europe's most knee-jerk case of anti-Yankee sentiment, they're also quick to say how much they love American music and the people themselves.

If the Greeks present Europe's most knee-jerk case of anti-Yankee sentiment, they're also quick to say how much they love American music and the people themselves.

Besides, the Americans didn't give them much to work with. The athletes who acted "American" in Friday night's parade walked under different flags, but no one hissed when the Haitian athletes came out windmilling their arms and cupping hands to their ears, and everyone found it charming when one Italian broke free and kissed the lens of a TV camera. Meanwhile, the U.S. team, looking stiff and nervous, did as it was told, reducing its usual exuberance to tight smiles and furious waves. U.S. officials declared themselves pleased, and it was all good to see, but a bit sad too, because the freewheeling style of American athletes has always been as envied a quality as U.S. wealth and power. There was a lightness in Mary Lou Retton that you didn't see in Nadia Comaneci, a looseness in Sugar Ray Leonard that you didn't see in Teofilo Stevenson.

Now? "It's a different world," Evans says. "There are things we didn't have to deal with years ago." Olympians have long been vessels for national hatred and hope, but it was strange to see so much of it play out here before the first medal was won. In seconds Greek elation went numb with shame. The U.S., meanwhile, avoided embarrassment and mass hostility. These days, that's a win. □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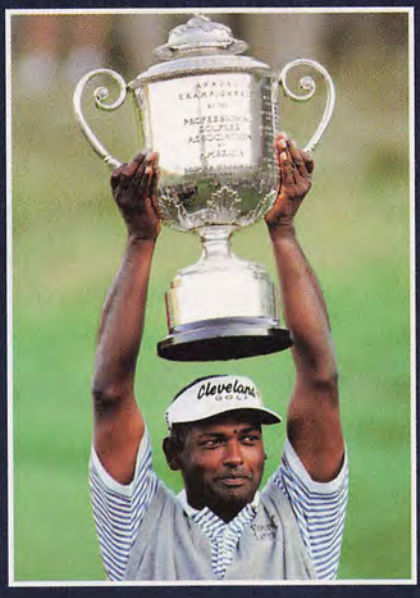
STRAITS TO THE TOP

With a dogged playoff win in the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, Vijay Singh removed any doubt that he is the world's best player

BY ALAN SHIPNUCK

NEVER GIVE a great player a second life. It's an axiom as old as golf, and Vijay Singh demonstrated its truth at the PGA Championship, with more than a little help from Justin Leonard. ¶ On Sunday at windblown Whistling Straits, a wondrous piece of sculpted earth some 60 miles south of Green Bay, Singh pulled off an overtime comeback so improbable it would have made Brett Favre blush, and in doing so affirmed that he is golf's dominant player. Leading his playing partner, Leonard, by a stroke at the start of the day, Singh hit the ball all over Wisconsin and putted with the delicacy of a linebacker, failing to make a single birdie on his way to a 76. This stunning collapse would have gone down as a career nadir were it not for Leonard's agonizing inability to close out Singh.

For most of his career the tough little Texan has been known as one of golf's great clutch putters, thanks in part to the epic 45-footer that all but wrapped up the 1999 Ryder Cup. But Leonard, 32, is no longer that same fearless kid who won in the British Open in 1997 and seemed destined to be the Trevino to Tiger Woods's Nicklaus—an imaginative shotmaker who would routinely steal majors from his more overpowering rival. Coming into this PGA, Leonard was suffering through the worst year of his career, and his confidence was so low that last month he called a sports psychologist, Gio Valenti, looking for answers. Appealing to his new client's analytical bent two weeks ago at the International, Valenti gave Leonard a PowerPoint presentation that included an explanation of the physiological effects of pressure, such as how the release of the hormone norepinephrine can restrict capillaries in the hands, tightening grip pressure.



VIJAY DAY After hoisting the Wanamaker Trophy for the second time, a satisfied Singh flashed a rare smile for the assembled media.

Thus loosened up, Leonard played his most inspired golf in years at Whistling Straits, but as he admitted on the eve of the final round, "I haven't been on a stage this big in a long time." On Sunday he struck the ball admirably but couldn't control his capillaries on the greens, especially down the stretch. On the 15th hole Leonard failed to convert a 12-foot birdie putt that would have put him three up with three to go. On the 16th he missed a five-footer for par, allowing a steadying Singh to inch within one stroke. Leonard

ROBERT BECK (BACKGROUND ALTERED BY SI IMAGING); DAVID BERGMAN (INSET)

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PGA CHAMPIONSHIP
WHISTLING STRAITS
2004
CONTESTANT

was still one up on the 72nd hole and had a 10-foot par putt for the championship, but he played too much break, giving Singh and Chris DiMarco, who was in the clubhouse at eight under, new life in the form of a three-hole playoff.

"He should have put my man away when he had the chance," Singh's caddie, Dave Renwick, would say afterward.

DiMarco was an accidental tourist in Sunday's drama. A gritty player who had started the day at seven-under, five strokes behind Singh, DiMarco was primarily concerned with finishing in the top eight, which would clinch his spot on the U.S. Ryder Cup team. (The PGA was the final tournament for qualifying.) DiMarco shot up the leader board with a burst of three birdies in four holes midway through his round, but he didn't realize he had a chance to win the tournament until he parred the 71st hole. He would have been better off not knowing. Admittedly nervous, he left a 15-foot birdie putt a few inches short on 18.

The playoff was defined by two fearless swings, both by three players, called it "one of the greatest shots in major championship history. Of course, it would have been better if he made the putt." Still, even after failing to cash in with a birdie, Singh was one up going to the final hole, the 500-yard par-4 18th, where only six birdies had been made all day. With a bloodless fairway-and-green par he snuffed out Leonard and DiMarco.

Asked afterward if it was his ugliest win ever, Singh said, "It's the prettiest one, I think. I just hung in there. I never gave up. . . . I think this is the biggest accomplishment I've ever had in my career."

HANGING IN Leonard's chip to seven feet on the second playoff hole kept the pressure on front-runner Singh.

DAVID WALBERG

During the playoff, Singh would say afterward, "I saw the shots so well, and I HIT THE SHOTS I WANTED TO HIT."

Singh. He is a fan of *Zen Golf*, an instructional book by Joseph Parent, and during the playoff, for the first time all day, his mind was "clear," Singh would say afterward. "I saw the shots so well, and I hit the shots I wanted to hit." While Leonard and DiMarco played conservatively on the first playoff hole, the 361-yard par-4 10th, using fairway metals off the tee, Singh ripped a driver to just short of the green, and with a deft chip he nabbed his first birdie of the day and a key one-stroke advantage over his competitors.

On the next hole, the devilish 236-yard par-3 17th, whose green is perched on the edge of Lake Michigan, Singh rifled an instantly classic three-iron through the breeze to within six feet. Renwick, who has now been on the bag during five major wins by

That would include 22 international victories and now 20 on the PGA Tour, notably the 1998 PGA and the 2000 Masters. What makes this PGA triumph so momentous is that it has finally clarified golf's new world order. The computers still rank Woods No. 1. But right now—particularly in the wake of a typically erratic two-under finish at the Straits, good for 24th place—Tiger, who has now gone 10 majors without a win, is only the fourth-best player in the game. Throughout this summer there has been a lively debate about how Singh, Ernie Els and Phil Mickelson should be ranked in the first three places on that list. But the top spot is no longer in dispute. At Whistling Straits, Els, who finished a shot back at seven under, achieved the Grand Slammed, having contended at all four major championships and then failed to win any of them. A stroke back of Els, Mickelson fell short in the third straight major following his Masters breakthrough. Meanwhile, Singh's fifth victory of the year (no one else has more than two) all but assures him of his first player of the year award. The $1.125 million winner's check gave him a 2004 total of $6,938,566 and a $1.3 million lead over second-place Mickelson in the money race, which Singh won last year for the first time, ending Woods's four-year reign.

What's astonishing about Singh's run is that at age 41 he is only getting better, and hungrier. "He has the kind of desire, discipline and commitment that very few athletes have," says personal trainer Joey Diovisalvi, who works with the 6' 2", 198-pound Singh for an hour and a half six days a week, whether on the road or at the 3,000-square-foot gym Singh just built at his home in Ponte Vedre Beach, Fla. "We recently started a more intense program, because he wants to go to another level. He wants to raise the bar to a height only he can reach."

Solidifying his standing as the game's most dominant player was all the sweeter for Singh because he was paired with Woods for the opening two rounds of the PGA. Singh described the vibe as "intense," and that was a polite way of putting it. When Woods began reinventing the sport in his image with a monster season in 1999, Singh was alone among the top players in openly welcoming the challenge. It was in February 2000 that he began reshaping his body, long before Els or Mickelson would make such a commitment. And Singh's Masters win that year ultimately denied Woods the Grand Slam. The cold war between Singh and Woods turned hot at the end of 2000, during a Presidents Cup singles match in which Singh was peeved when Tiger failed to concede a series of short putts.

As Singh has caught up to and then passed Woods, their relations have grown more strained. Before their tee time together for the final round of last year's American Express Championship, the

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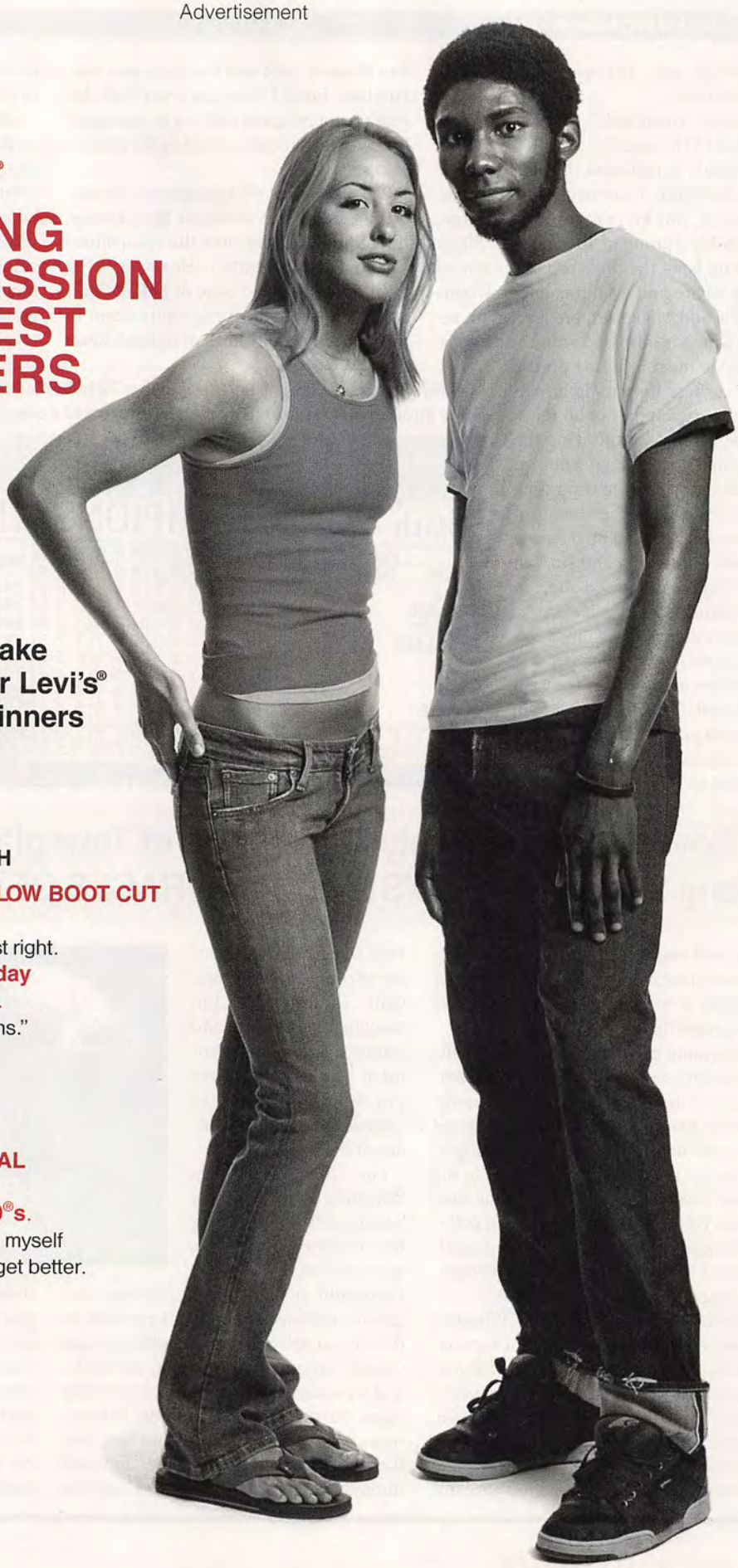

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following was the entirety of their conversation:

Woods: "Good luck."

Singh: "Titleist 2."

It is this prickliness that has made it hard for Singh to connect with fans and reporters, but he is revered by a large, fiercely loyal group of Tour players. Singh has long been the pro's pro, an oracle of swing advice and encouragement. Woods and Els and Mickelson are fixated on results. Singh is obsessed with the process, and he is most at home on the range, where he puts in an extraordinary number of hours.

Last Thursday, following the first round, Singh held court on the driving range, demonstrating a drill for an eclectic cluster of players that included Brad Faxon, Shigeki Maruyama and Bo Van Pelt. Singh had stuck a shaft in the ground at a precise angle, forcing him to swing along a certain plane. A bottle of water was placed just ahead and to the right of his ball, forcing an outside-in action to protect against a hook, the shot that most often gets him in trouble. While he swung, a glove was wedged between Singh's right arm and chest, keeping his swing compact and tight. Even with all these restrictions he pounded drives to the horizon.

Maruyama tried to hit a couple of balls with Singh's setup, but after a few screaming hooks he gave up, giggling madly. Faxon had more success and was so jazzed by the results that he said, "I'm going to go out and find a shaft and stick it in the ground as soon as I can." Later Faxon said, "To me Vijay's got the best swing in golf—so balanced, so athletic, so powerful, so effortless. I don't even know the right adjective. *Awesome* doesn't do it justice."

Like the champion it produced, Whistling Straits had onlookers groping for superlatives. Singh's victory elevated, and validated, one of the most talked-about venues in recent years. The Straits opened in 1998, and it was a leap of faith for the PGA to visit so soon. The tournament usually has the scent of old money, as august private clubs like Winged Foot and Medinah and Oak Hill have hosted in recent years. But this year the tournament smelled of the singed bratwursts that were served at the concession stands.

The visionary who imagined championship golf in this setting is Herb Kohler, the billionaire who runs the eponymous plumbing fixture empire. He owned a flat tract of land on the edge of Lake Michigan but wanted a course reminiscent of the wild and woolly links of Ireland. Enter Pete Dye, the mad scientist of course architecture, who imported 13,126 truckloads of sand and sculpted among the man-made dunes what Tour pro Stuart Appleby has dubbed "the eighth wonder of the world."

On the final day, Whistling Straits played at 7,536 yards, longest ever for a major championship, and was defined by 1,400 beautifully shaggy bunkers; sinister, serpentine fairways; and greens perched on the edge of oblivion. It is perhaps the most visually intimidating course in the world, and for many players it was not love at first sight during the cold, windy practice rounds. "I was told before I got here that there were 10 really difficult holes and eight impossible holes," Lee Westwood said on the eve of the tournament. "I'm just trying to work out which are the 10 difficult holes."

All the players' harrumphing had an effect on the course setup, because the PGA brass was deathly afraid of getting Shinnecocked, a word that has entered the lexicon in the wake of the debacle at this year's U.S. Open, where over-the-top course conditions led to embarrassing scores and red-faced tournament officials. On Thursday the tees were moved up by about 50 yards on three of the toughest holes (8, 11 and 18), and all of the exacting par-3s were given accessible pin placements on the front of the greens. On this neutered golf course 39 players broke par, led by Darren Clarke's 65. Leonard fired a 66, one better than Singh.

Beginning on Friday the tees were moved back and the flags tucked, but in relatively calm conditions the scores continued to plunge during the second and third rounds. When the sun came out on Sunday and the wind blew hard, turning the greens firm and fast, the Straits finally showed its teeth. In the final 15 twosomes no one broke 70, but there was no grumbling afterward. Leonard said the course was "fantastic," while Singh was among the many players calling for future major championships at the Straits. That could happen as early as the 2012 U.S. Open.

By then Singh will be nearing 50 and almost surely enshrined in the Hall of Fame. It has been a remarkable journey for the native of Fiji, who honed his game as a club pro in Borneo and then on various tours across Africa, Asia and Europe. When Singh arrived in America to play a full schedule, in 1993, he was hoping only to make a decent living, but he has done so much more than that. As Leonard learned on Sunday, Singh is not one to waste a golden opportunity. □

LOGJAM The issue was still unresolved after 72 holes, but a firmer stroke by DiMarco at 18 might have prevented a playoff.

86th PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

HOLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
LEADERS / PAR	4	5	3	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	5	3	4	
SINGH	12	12	12	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	280
LEONARD	11	11	12	12	12	12	11	11	11	10	10	10	11	10	10	9	9	8	280
DIMARCO	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	9	10	10	10	9	8	8	8	280
MICKELSON	8	8	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	282
AMES	8	8	9	9	10	9	8	9	9	9	9	8	7	6	5	5	5	5	283
DAVIS	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	8	7	7	6	5	6	6	4	4	4	4	284
ELS	8	8	7	7	6	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7	6	7	8	8	7	
CLARKE	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	5	4	4	
~~RILEY~~	~~9~~	~~9~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~5~~	~~6~~	~~7~~	~~7~~	~~9~~	~~9~~	~~8~~	~~8~~	~~8~~	~~7~~	
CHOI	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	6	

Revered by a fiercely loyal group of Tour players, Singh has long been THE PRO'S PRO, AN ORACLE OF SWING ADVICE.

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SANYO

Keeping Your Balance With A Crazy Calendar

BY RICK WOLFF

Several years ago, my son played on a hockey team with the son of Marcel Dionne, the Hall of Fame scorer for the Red Wings, Kings and Rangers. Toward the end of the season, parents were discussing whether their kids would be signing up for a spring hockey league. The grinding schedule had lasted from mid-September through mid-March, and I wasn't sure that a spring session on the ice made sense for my son. So I asked Dionne how much hockey he played as a kid when he was growing up in Canada. "It wasn't too complicated," he told me. "We played hockey in the winter, baseball in the spring and soccer in the fall."

I kept that in mind as I encouraged my kids to play a variety of sports, but times have changed dramatically. These days, for many athletes (and their parents), the seasons don't stop. Kids play soccer on teams in fall, winter and spring, and then they go off to soccer camp in the summer. Just about any sport has year-round options, so they all overlap and often overextend kids who try to find time to compete in every sport they enjoy.

This isn't likely to change. In fact, it's up to you to help your family negotiate the nonstop sports calendar. Your kids can't lose sight of more important priorities, and the whole family shouldn't feel consumed by running from game to game, practice to practice, sport to sport.

During the critical developmental years when kids start playing sports more seriously, parents must try to teach their young athletes to maintain a sense of balance. While it's great that your kids enjoy athletics, it's essential that they, as NBA forward Grant Hill has said, "pack two parachutes in life." Hill's parents taught him the importance of varied interests. He excelled in school and learned to play piano. If basketball hadn't worked out for him, he would have had diverse experiences to draw from.

Help your children prioritize their time among athletics, schoolwork and other activities. The good news is that kids who play sports generally manage time better, but they need parental support to learn this balancing act. Sit with them to map out all of their games and practices on the family calendar. It gives them a feel for the busy days and months ahead and what they must do to accomplish everything.

Taking this time with the calendar in advance can be as helpful for you as it is for your athlete. You can grasp how demanding the sports schedule is going to be on the rest of the family. Getting your son to and from practices and games can be a daunting enough task when he's just playing one sport at a time. Throw in a couple of other sports and perhaps another child with games of her own, and it can get downright chaotic. Unfortunately, too many parents don't think enough about how complicated these logistics can be. Preseason parental planning should involve everything from transportation (setting up carpools with teammates) to communication lines in case of emergencies or inclement weather. Organizing ahead of time can save you a lot of physical and emotional wear and tear later on.

Even if you do get organized, you'll still need a break eventually. So will your child, and you should encourage him to take one. Many young athletes think they need to play their sport (or sports) throughout the year to keep up with other players, but that's not the case. They should never feel pressured to take on so much that sports become more of an obligation than a fun activity. They will need some vacation time or simply a chance to step away and enjoy all the other aspects of being a kid. It will prevent burnout, and it will also refresh them for the seasons ahead.

Rick Wolff is chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting (www.sportsparenting.org). His latest book is The Sports Parenting Edge: The Winning Game Plan for Every Athlete from T-Ball to College Recruiting *(Running Press).*

ILLUSTRATION BY MARC ROSENTHAL

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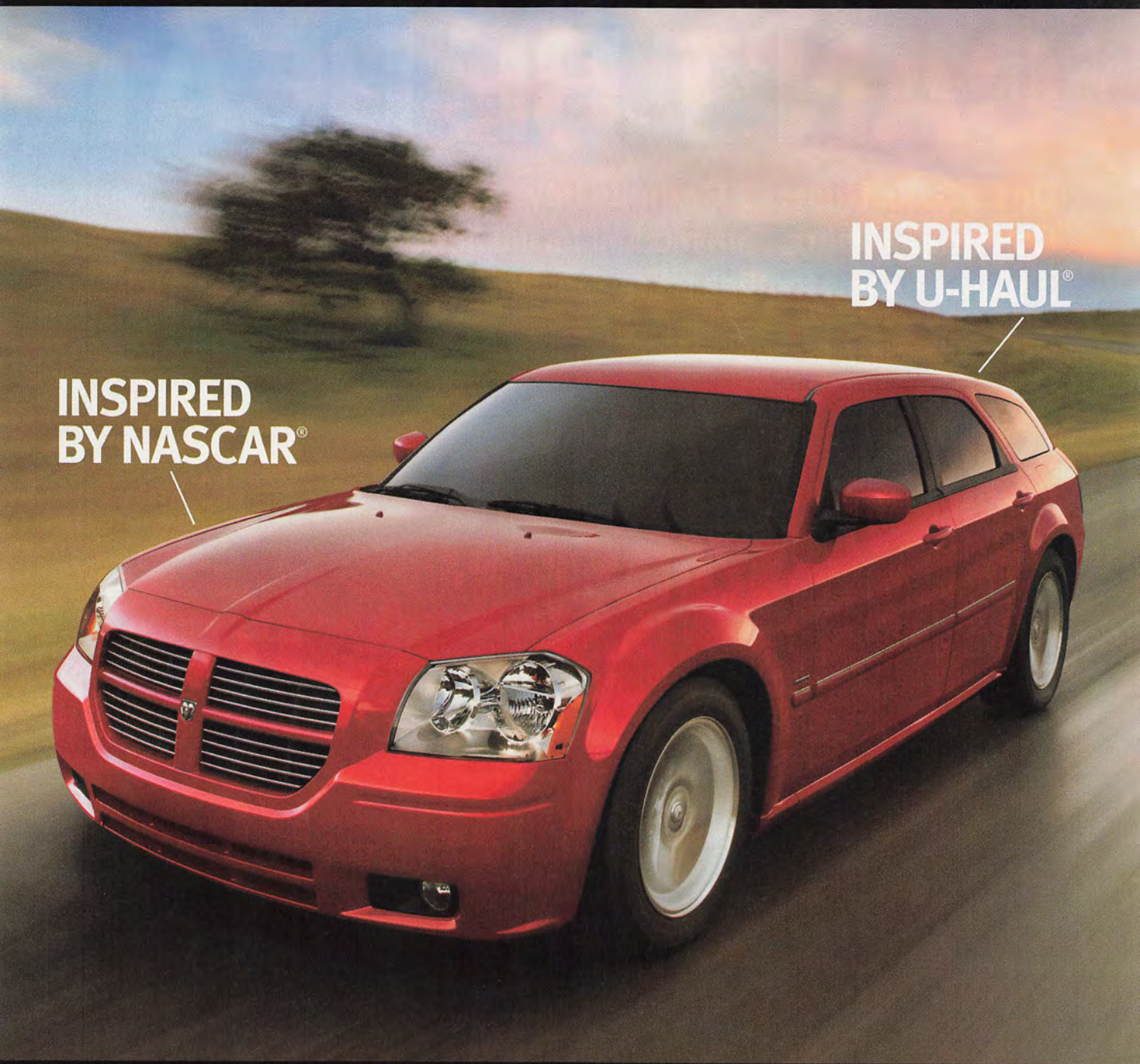
GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS

DODGE



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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

THE LITTLE SCHOOL THAT CAN'T BE BEAT

De La Salle High is a Catholic boys' school in a quiet Northern California suburb, with modest facilities, unassuming student-athletes—and a football team that has won 151 games in a row

BY KELLEY KING

HERE, IN THE HILLS fanning east from the San Francisco Bay, perch some of the most pleasant suburbs in all of California. Temperatures float between mild and balmy. Crime rates are low. Complaints tend towards such trivialities as traffic on the freeway or the length of the checkout lines at Trader Joe's. Central Contra Costa County is often called the East Bay's quintessential bedroom community, and the description seems apt. It's a comfortable, sleepy place; "a land of lotus eaters," jokes local guidebook author Don McCormack. Folks, for the most part, rest easy. ¶ For anyone lulled by the mellow rhythm of these suburbs, the scene at one particular Contra Costa high school can be a shock to the senses. In a small, poorly ventilated weight room tucked into the back of the school, three dozen boys are training with a ferocious intensity. While half of the group rotates among a crowded assortment of barbells and hand weights, the other

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT
The Spartans' year-round drilling and conditioning pays off in virtually mistake-free football.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT CLARK

half is moving through an exacting circuit of push-ups, sit-ups and other calisthenics on a walkway between the gym and the weight room. Every so often a young man supervising the workouts blows a whistle, and the boys, sweat soaking their white T-shirts and green gym shorts, hustle to the next station. Because his charges continually urge one another to keep up the tempo, the supervisor has little more to do.

It's March, and this is an "off-season" football workout at De La Salle High in Concord, where, from the middle of January through the start of preseason practice in late summer, players attend voluntary workouts that last up to three hours a day, four days a week. While football may start with the school year elsewhere, it's a year-round preoccupation for a team that is shouldering perhaps the heftiest expectations in all of sports. By the end of the 2003 season, De La Salle had won 151 straight games, a record for an American football team at any level. That streak will be on the line when the Spartans, with only seven returning starters, go into Seahawks Stadium in Seattle on Sept. 4 to face Bellevue High, the reigning Washington Class 3A champion.

So while other De La Salle students step around the exercising athletes on their way to their Jettas and Jeeps, chattering about the usual teen distractions—homework, girlfriends, music—the football players push on, their thoughts flickering to a game that is still far off.

ON A MISSION After an injury-plagued college career, Ladouceur found a higher calling teaching religion and football at De La Salle.

THERE ARE those who will cluck disapprovingly at this tableau. They'll talk about tunnel vision, about how teenagers are more susceptible to overuse injuries because their bones are still growing. But coaches who have faced De La Salle can only marvel at the effects of this year-round training. Delbert Tengan, for instance, is the former coach of St. Louis School of Honolulu, which played De La Salle in September 2002, in the Spartans' first-ever foray outside of California. He remembers only too well how his Crusaders, enjoying a decided home field advantage at Aloha Stadium, were defeated by the mainlanders, 31–21—a score that didn't reflect the lopsidedness of the game—relegating the pride of Hawaii to No. 127 in a mounting list of De La Salle's victims.

Alone in his coaching office after the loss, Tengan popped a videotape of the game in his VCR to find out why his team had failed, despite detailed scouting reports, rested starters and even new uniforms for the game. He watched as the California kids took their three-point stance in military unison and then reacted to the snap as if jerked by a single leash. He noticed how their undersized linemen charged without fear into brawny Hawaiians who outweighed them by an average of 48 pounds, and how their running backs protected the football as they zipped into the end zone. Tengan pushed the rewind button again and again, searching for the mental errors that every high school team—hell, most Division I college teams—make. He found none.

Tengan sighs heavily when asked to sum up what makes De La Salle special. Where to begin? "I've seen more purely athletic teams," says Tengan, "but you're not going to see a group more precision-oriented, more disciplined. It's incredible."

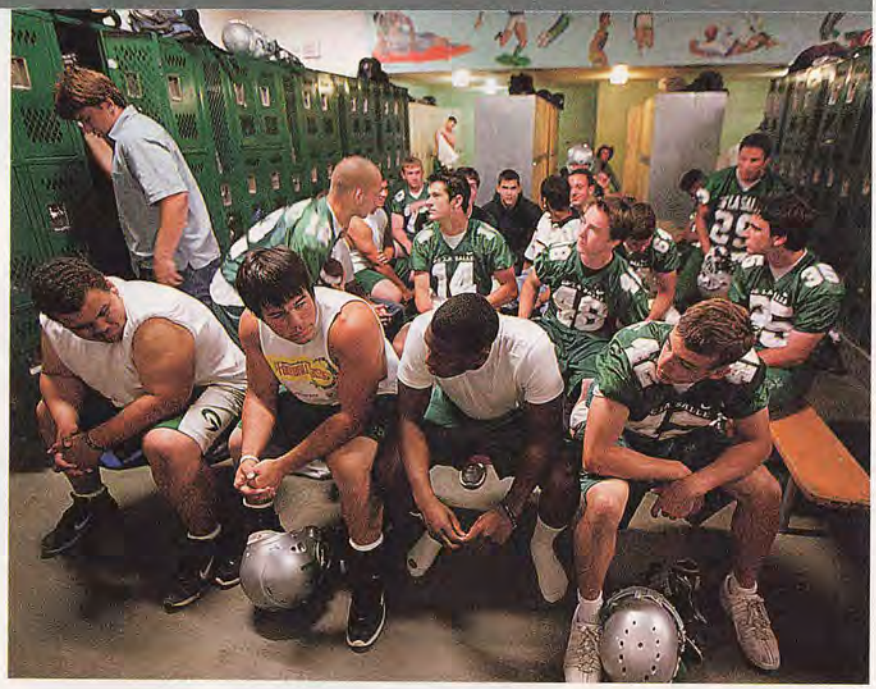
How is it that of the more than 13,000 high school football teams in the U.S., none has attracted as far-reaching a following as this Catholic school of 1,007 boys? Perhaps it's the sheer dominance that the team displays. Since the Spartans' last defeat, on Dec. 7, 1991, they've won those 151 games by an average score of 49–7, and the vanquished have included some of the nation's most storied programs. Besides winning 12 straight North Coast section titles (California, because of its size, does not have a single state championship), De La Salle has twice toppled Long Beach Poly, a Southern California pipeline to the NFL, and has also beaten Louisiana's mighty Evangel Christian while finishing No. 1 in *USA Today*'s high school rankings five times in the past six years.

Though De La Salle's success naturally fosters some jealousy among local rivals, most everyone who follows high school football is fascinated by what is simply referred to as the Streak. In the past two years it has inspired two books and a feature-length documentary. Spartans games have also been aired nationwide on DirecTV and ESPN2. "When they've been on television, most people I know were watching," says former 49ers coach Bill Walsh, who wears a Spartans jacket that was given to him when he spoke at a recent De La Salle banquet. "Is this unusual? Sure. This is a high school team that plays like a very good college team."

Even more remarkable than such endorsements is how unimpressed the school seems to be with itself. De La Salle is among 45 U.S. high schools that are operated by the De La Salle Christian Brothers, an order that follows the teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the 17th-century saint who emphasized the importance of faith and community service in education. In the spirit of that mission, the school's facilities are deliberately unassuming. The De La Salle receptionist often fields calls from confused tourists who have driven right past the squat brick school building, convinced that the mighty football factory must be farther down the road. The football field, squeezed between a quiet boulevard and a private home, has only a modest set of bleachers. There's no roadside marquee to promote football games, and the locker room and gymnasium have not been renovated in 39 years (though there are plans afoot for a schoolwide renovation, including the lockers). When De La Salle's parking lot isn't filled with boys bustling from car to class, it's likely being swept clean by one of the Christian Brothers teachers and administrators.

"What amazed me immediately about

COURTESY OF SAN JOSE STATE (LEFT)



CLOSE-KNIT The pressure to maintain a streak that began more than a decade ago creates a tight bond among the Spartans.

De La Salle is how low-key football is, at least away from the field," says Brother Christopher Brady, the principal since July 2000. He doesn't care much for football but knows a thing or two about its rabid fan culture thanks to his nephew Tom, who has quarterbacked the New England Patriots to two Super Bowl wins. "These players are humble enough to keep striving year after year."

On the eve of a big game, cheerleaders from Carondelet, De La Salle's sister school across the street, might hang signs in the school courtyard. But they do the same for other Spartans teams, many of which have risen with the tide of the football program. De La Salle's basketball team, for instance, won California's 2003 northern district championship.

"I've seen more athletic teams." says a rival coach, "but you're not going to see a more precision-oriented, MORE DISCIPLINED GROUP."

The football team's staunchest supporters are the students' parents, including a group called the White Coats, who sell tickets and direct traffic on game day. They, too, are cognizant that De La Salle's mission is more about building a healthy learning environment than building a football power. "Sports parents and football alumni have been generous in contributing to the school, but they rarely earmark [their gifts] for football," says De La Salle development director Erin Jones.

Fittingly, in attitude and appearance, the players don't have the aura of blue-chippers. The team is mostly white, with a handful of African-American and Asian kids, a mix that loosely reflects Contra Costa County's demographics. Aside from a couple of beefy linemen, the football players aren't much taller or stouter than the average peach-fuzzed student. This is why the Spartans are rarely the focus of Division I recruiting wars. Last February, when four players signed with Oregon and one with Illinois, it was considered an unusually successful scholarship haul.

"We'll usually have a few really talented skill guys, but this year, for instance, we won't have a single player who can run a 4.5 40-yard-dash," says senior quarterback–safety Anthony Gutierrez. "Our strength, our quickness, our knowledge of the game has everything to do with the hard work we put in." All but a handful of football players have voluntarily dropped second sports to work on football full time. This level of training scares away exactly the kind of player who wouldn't easily survive the rigors of a De La Salle season. For many middle schoolers, on the other hand, the off-season workouts make De La Salle more appealing than the public schools in the area. Senior center Scott Hugo remembers walking by the weight room as an eighth-grader and being struck by the energy that seethed inside. "I knew I had to come here," says Hugo. "I mean, you know they're not doing this at Ygnacio Valley."

THERE IS, as might be expected, an air of intrigue surrounding the man who has conjured this sort of dedication from such a distractible age group. For the past quarter century, the most celebrated high school football team in America has been coached by Bob Ladouceur, a man known by his staff as the Ghost. "You turn around and Coach Lad is there," says offensive coordinator Mark Panella, one of four assistants who used to play for Ladouceur. "It's like he has a trap door," adds Danny Ladouceur, the second of the coach's three children and a senior wide receiver at De La Salle. "And when he appears, he just commands everyone's attention. I've had people tell me that they think he's, like, a higher presence."

And why not, with a coaching record that appears to be a typo? At 287-14-1, Ladouceur has had more undefeated seasons—17—than losses.

Like the campus itself, the coach seems an unlikely wellspring of gridiron greatness. Ladouceur, who also teaches religious studies at De La Salle, has a low-pitched voice and a contemplative way of speaking that seem better suited for an NPR morning show than for calling out coverages from the sideline. When out-of-towners come to a De La Salle game, they often look past Ladouceur—who considers headsets, like hollering, a pointless affectation—and assume the fidgety, gruff-talking Terry Eidson is the head coach; he's actually the athletic director and assistant coach. Off the field, though, there's no doubt about who's in charge: It's clear in the bone-chilling glare Ladouceur turns on a player to convey

that, yes, the offensive line *will* work on a simple footwork drill for yet another hour; or in the quietly powerful motivational speeches he delivers at the homes of the families that host the team's Thursday night spaghetti dinners during the season.

Ladouceur is so committed to his players and program that he has turned down offers from colleges to leave Concord and improve upon his five-figure salary. "The man has no ambition other than to help those boys be successful," says Walsh, who tried to hire Ladouceur as an assistant at Stanford when Walsh was coaching the Cardinal from 1992 to '94. Ladouceur, 50, has thought about retiring from coaching, but the impulse fades as anticipation of the next season begins. "I always ask my players and students what they're passionate about," says Ladouceur, "and I don't want to hear that it's shooting baskets. I want them to learn that it's not so much what you do as how it affects the world. I'm passionate about coaching, but it's not about football. It's about being important to those kids."

If he had any immediate desire to escape the long Saturdays and the countless hours of midweek film work, this winter might have been the ideal time to go. A big senior class was graduating. Young, eager assistants like strength coach Justin Alumbaugh, a former Spartans linebacker who is being groomed to someday take over the program, seem committed to De La Salle's future. And then, on New Year's Eve, after a jog around his San Ramon neighborhood, Ladouceur laid down on his bed with tightness in his chest. Beverly, his wife of 28 years, came into the room to discover him writhing in pain. "Next thing I knew, there were EMTs standing over me," says Ladouceur, who had suffered a heart attack caused by a blocked coronary artery.

RIGHT START Thanks to his mother's efforts to keep him out of trouble, Taylor (53) was able to attend De La Salle and go on to make it big at Notre Dame and in the NFL; other former Spartans include the Giants' Amani Toomer (81), 2004 first-rounder Williams (17) and Michigan QB Matt Gutierrez (12).

Ladouceur spent five days in the hospital, where he received stent implants. When his son Danny visited him, he saw his colorless complexion and the tubes trailing out of his body and asked the question that was buzzing throughout Contra Costa County, "Do you think you're going to keep coaching?"

"Well, yeah," said Dad, bristling a little.

"Like there wasn't even a question," says Danny.

Upon coming home, Ladouceur tossed out his last-ever pack of cigarettes, and six weeks later he was back teaching and studying film in his cramped coach's office.

A Detroit native who grew up in the East Bay, Ladouceur fought hard and played smart through an injury-plagued career as a tailback and defensive back at Utah and San Jose State. He got his coaching start in 1977 as a part-time assistant at Monte Vista High in Danville, Calif. (During the week he worked as a probation officer at a juvenile detention center.) A year later De La Salle, then a 12-year-old school with a reputation for strong academics, needed a new football coach, preferably one who could also fill a religious studies teaching vacancy. Ladouceur had a degree from San Jose State and was taking night classes in theology, and though he had no teaching experience to that point, he got the job. When he arrived on campus, he found a handful of smallish boys with scant football knowledge. The program that would become the most dominant in high school history had never had a winning season.

De La Salle saw no reason to pour funds into a team that was generating little interest, so Ladouceur, then 25, served as head coach, offensive coordinator, strength coach and equipment manager. The first thing he did was to have his players bring in whatever weights might be lying around their houses and, at a time when off-season workouts weren't standard even in college, instituted a running program he thought could give his undersized players an edge late in games. Then he taught his players a split backs veer offense, still the basis for more than half of De La Salle's plays. In Ladouceur's mind the simple system, which depends on quickness and execution, would help level the playing field against bigger opponents.

In 1979 De La Salle was shut out twice

CLIZBE FAMILY (TAYLOR); JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES (TOOMER); KEVIN REECE/ICON SMI (WILLIAMS); TODD ROSENBERG/ICON SMI (GUTIERREZ)

but finished 6–3. In each of the next two years the Spartans had two losses. Then, in 1982, they went 12–0, with a 48–0 pasting of Salesian, a school that had beaten them 32–0 three years before. During that first undefeated season, Eidson, who was also teaching religion at the school, joined the coaching staff. He soon became Ladouceur's righthand man, providing an excitable yang to the head coach's cool, calculated yin.

As the program improved, better athletes began to arrive. Many of their parents had picked up stakes to move closer to the school or took extra jobs to afford the tuition (now $9,950). Aaron Taylor, who would go on to be a standout offensive lineman at Notre Dame before spending six seasons in the NFL with the Green Bay Packers and the San Diego Chargers, was a self-described 14-year-old drug dealer in Marin County when he and his mother, Mardi, saw a news segment about the Spartans on television in 1986. Knowing that her son's sole healthy ambition was to become a football star and that De La Salle offered a stronger academic program than the school Aaron attended, Mardi found a job and a house in Concord and set about trying to enroll her son in the school.

The Taylors' experience belies the periodic rumors that the Spartans recruit top kids in the area. "I was a 280-pound 15-year-old when I came to De La Salle and announced that I wanted to play," says Aaron. "You know what Coach Lad said? Take an entrance exam, talk to admissions people, and then maybe, if that went O.K., we could talk about football." Like all of Ladouceur's players Aaron also had to agree to a team rule and promise he wouldn't drink or do drugs as long as he was on the squad.

Admission to De La Salle is awarded by a panel that does not include any football staffers, and financial aid is determined by an independent, off-site service. Says Brady, "We regularly turn away strong football players who we think won't make it academically."

Even the coach of De La Salle's biggest rival, Concord's own Clayton Valley, thinks most rumors regarding the Spartans' recruiting stem from jealousy, that the school's success has been its most effective draw. "Has an assistant coach or two talked up De La Salle to a prospective student? Certainly," says Eagles coach Herc Pardi. "Have alumni done the same? I believe it. But that happens at public and private schools everywhere. I am certain neither Bob Ladouceur nor Terry Eidson has actively recruited a single player."

AT DE LA SALLE winning isn't everything; it's the only thing you don't talk about. "Everyone asks me how I've won 151 straight games," says Ladouceur. "My answer is always the same: 'By not concentrating on winning.' If you work hard enough, the wins will just come."

But those wins have attracted attention, much of it unwelcomed by Ladouceur, who has done his polite best to dodge reporters for as long as they've hovered around De La Salle's cramped sidelines. Sixty-seven wins into the Streak, Eidson went to the chalkboard in the locker room and scrawled 72 in big numbers. "If you don't know what this means," he then told the players, "you're gonna soon find out."

The number referred to the previous high school football record for consecutive wins, set by Hudson (Mich.) High from 1968 to '75. On Nov. 7, 1997, De La Salle, led by future Miami linebacker and 2004 Denver Broncos first-rounder D.J. Williams, shattered the record with a 56–0 win over regional rival College Park High of Pleasant Hill, Calif. *The New York Times*, CNN, ESPN and SI were among the news outlets that covered the game. The following year the Spartans showed up on Cheerios boxes, one of which is tucked in a dusty corner of a neglected trophy case outside the school gym.

It was around this time that De La Salle began to get scheduling requests from teams that wanted a shot at snapping the Streak. Ladouceur was uncomfortable with the idea of parading his players around the state but realized that a strictly local schedule was unfair to his team. "You wouldn't feed kids algebra," he says, "when they're already on calculus."

One of De La Salle's first powerhouse challengers was Mater Dei of Santa Ana. In four games from 1998 to '01, the

"What amazed me is how low-key football is here," says Brady. "These players are HUMBLE ENOUGH TO KEEP STRIVING year after year."

One Terrible Loss

De La Salle copes with a death in the football family

SPARTANS PLAYERS often make references to their football family. At around 10:30 on the night of Aug. 12, a member of that family was shot and killed while alone in his car. Terrance Kelly, 18, who graduated in May, was waiting to pick up a family acquaintance in Richmond, Calif., where his grandmother lived. As of Monday police had one suspect in custody and were seeking others, but they had yet to determine a motive for the killing. "He was a quiet kid who was never in any trouble," says De La Salle principal Christopher Brady.

FALLEN Kelly, an '03 MVP, had signed with Oregon.

Richmond is considered one of the more dangerous areas in the East Bay, with 18 homicides reported so far in 2004. Kelly commuted about 30 minutes each way from his grandmother's home to attend De La Salle, where he flourished. After a senior year in which he rushed for 1,014 yards at running back and had 122 tackles at linebacker, he signed with Oregon along with three of his Spartans teammates. He was due to join the Ducks last Saturday.

Instead, De La Salle players, coaches and parents gathered last Friday in the school's chapel to talk about Kelly's death and share memories of their teammate. A school memorial is planned for Aug. 23. "People ask what it's like to never lose," says athletic director Terry Eidson, "but we have losses all the time that have nothing to do with games."

—K.K.

KARL MONDON/CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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– Mr. Opportunity

Civic EX Coupe

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Spartans outscored their Southern California counterparts 135–55 before bringing a halt to the series. In '01 they took on Long Beach Poly, which has produced more NFL players (50) than any other high school. The first time the teams met, Poly, with 24 players who would land Division I scholarships, was ranked No. 1 in *USA Today* and De La Salle was No. 2. The Spartans won 29–15. The following October the Spartans prevailed again, 28–7.

Two years ago De La Salle's competitive circle widened further when the Spartans agreed to go on that trip to Honolulu, but only when the game's Hawaiian sponsors offered to foot the bill for the trip. Last year brought Evangel Christian, which agreed to come to Concord when De La Salle declined to make the expensive trip to Shreveport. For their trouble, the eight-time Louisiana state champions were handed a 27–10 loss that was watched by more than half a million viewers on ESPN2. It wouldn't have been that close if the Spartans hadn't taken a knee on their opponents' one-yard line three straight times in the final minutes. "That," said Evangel coach Dennis Dunn afterward, "was class."

In an NPR broadcast the week of that game, Concord resident Murray Sperber, the former Indiana University professor and author of several books on the corruption of amateur athletics, offered a less rosy commentary on the game. "There's never been this kind of national schedule [for high school football] before, and particularly between high schools who travel great distances to play each other," said Sperber. "There's a kind of inevitability to this, but you don't have to like it. I personally think it's terrible."

Patrick Walsh, who played for De La Salle in the early '90s and now coaches at Junipero Serra High in nearby San Mateo, wishes detractors could spend a year with the Spartans. "For those [De La Salle] coaches, football is a platform for teaching you how to work hard, how to grow into an upstanding man. How to commit."

Of all the people who worry about how De La Salle's celebrity might affect the players, none frets more than the religion teacher who built the program. As the Streak grows, Ladouceur concentrates on keeping his charges focused and grounded. Each week during the season, players must write their goal for the next game on an index card and hand it to a teammate, who will remind him before, during and after the contest of what he'd written. On Thursdays the Spartans gather in the school chapel to listen to inspirational readings from their teammates. In one such meeting last year, star wide receiver Cameron Colvin, who was declared academically ineligible for five games, tearfully apologized to the team and expressed how lucky he felt, having lost both of his parents, to be part of this football family.

"It's an amazing scene," says *Contra Costa Times* columnist Neil Hayes, who spent a year with the team to write a book about De La Salle. "I would drive away from those sessions saying, What am I doing for my fellow man? What am I doing that's important?"

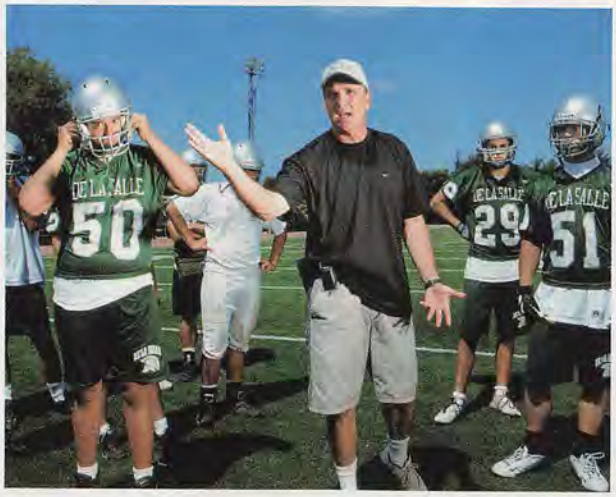
For the time being, De La Salle refuses to play more than one out-of-state game per year and strictly limits both expenses and lost class time related to that game. Eidson says he is on the verge of working out a game with Union High in Tulsa for 2006 and may one day look to talent-packed Texas for opponents. "We're not a traveling circus," says Eidson. "At the same time, I'm a competitive person. So's Bob Ladouceur. We don't want people to think that we're protecting this [streak]."

Some players admit to a fear of being the first to lose. "My brother played on the team that started it, and when I came along, all his friends would call and say 'Don't you *dare* blow it,' " says Alumbaugh. "Thankfully, Coach Lad keeps you so busy you don't have too much time to dwell on that stuff."

And if they do lose? Surely it would only stoke the Spartans' fire, the intensity of which is evident on this March day. Never mind that Alumbaugh, the team's off-season supervisor, has gone for the day, or that Ladouceur, the voice inside their heads, long ago left the building. Their muscles sufficiently exhausted in the weight room, the Spartans are working on pass plays. At one point, an injured sophomore defensive back drifts off to chat with someone. When he returns, he gets an earful from Gutierrez, the senior quarterback who is just doing what his brother Matt, now the quarterback at Michigan, would have done three years ago when he was at De La Salle.

Mottled gray clouds hover in a darkening blue sky. A cold rain starts to fall, and most people milling around campus scurry for cover. The football players stay. They stay because that's what the Spartans who came before them would have done. They stay because Coach Ladouceur, through sickness and health, stayed for them. They stay so they too can say what Oregon-bound receiver Colvin said to one of the many reporters who visited Concord in the past year: "I can leave here knowing I did my part to keep the Streak alive." □

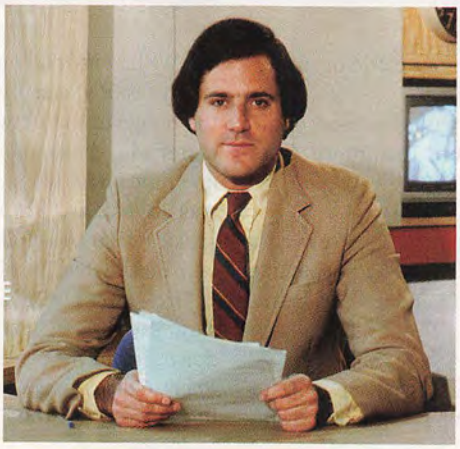
"I'm passionate about coaching," says Ladouceur, "but it's NOT ABOUT FOOTBALL. It's about being important to those kids."



MY WAY Coach Lad has no use for headsets, but all the Spartans know who's in charge once the helmets go on.

LIGHT YEARS AWAY
Berman is, if anything, less buttoned-down than he was in the early days (opposite).

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/ IDEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY



BOOM TIMES

Let's go back-back-back through 25 years with ESPN's Chris (Boomer) Berman, whose outsized enthusiasms have stamped his network, sports and television

BY CHARLES P. PIERCE

Listen to me. . . . Television is a circus, a carnival, a traveling troupe of acrobats, storytellers, dancers, singers, jugglers, sideshow freaks, lion tamers and football players.

—HOWARD BEALE, *Network*

WE INVITED the thing into our living rooms, for the love of God. ¶ We invited it into our living rooms, and there was a promise implicit that it would behave itself the way the rest of the furniture did. We invited it in there with the sectional sofas and the mahogany end tables. We put it there in the corner, big and square. We put the pictures of the kids on top of it, and all we asked was that it behave itself, and, for a while, it did. ¶ It did what it was supposed to do, as dependable in its own way as the mahogany end tables. If anyone got too noisy, Paladin or Sergeant Saunders or Captain Kirk would whip out the Colt revolver or the tommy gun or the phaser-on-stun and demonstrate proper deportment to whatever rustlers or Nazis or Klingons

ESPN

came into our living room to make off with our cattle or invade our European allies or seize our tiny universes.

Elsewhere, politics was delivered by men with the voices of the Old Testament prophets and faces of Mount Rushmore. Chet Huntley. The younger Cronkite.

The flash, from Dallas, apparently official. . . .

And sports was live grand opera in miniature. Mighty events brought to us by two dim cameras and described by people like Ray Scott, who occasionally even dispensed with verbs as extraneous ostentation unfit for the moment.

Starr . . . touchdown.

Then, about 25 years ago, it changed on us. It started mainlining its sustenance, shooting up its programming instead of breathing it in from the sweet, clean breezes of the air. Then it started to misbehave. There were four channels full of Nazis, and Captain Kirk was on nine channels at once. Politics suddenly became the province of screeching vulpine harpies. The pictures of the kids began to shake. The sectional sofa became less comfortable. The mahogany end tables seemed less solid.

And sports?

Well, when the television began using the cable to shoot up, sports was the purest product it could find. Sports were everywhere, and so were their voices, which no longer dispensed with verbs but used them promiscuously, along with adjectives, adverbs and all manner of gallivanting orthographic fauna up to and including the lyrics to the collected works of Edison Lighthouse. And some of those voices—hell, *most* of those voices—were loud.

Like this one, for example, which is, in its own surpassingly friendly way, rattling coffee cups across the crowded cafeteria and, perhaps, across Sumatra, as well. Chris Berman—universally beloved and even widely respected across the sprawling campus of ESPN in Bristol, Conn.—has come into work this summer's day. People drop by the table, including Tony Valentino, who, like Berman, has worked at ESPN for 25 years, which is all the years that there's been an ESPN. Berman is talking about the great arc of things that has brought him here from the days when ESPN consisted of little more than mud and the dreams of Bill Rasmussen, who launched the network with a $10 million stake from Getty Oil.

"We're the Mercury astronauts, that's who I think I am," Berman explains. "Not me alone, but those of us who were here in the beginning were the Mercury astronauts, and I'm Alan Shepard because I've done all three stages, you know? I went up with Mercury. I was in Gemini and Apollo."

(We pause here to mention that Shepard did only two stages—Mercury and Apollo. But what the hell. Berman's rolling.)

"Or to make it more plain for everyone, it was like we had a car. We had no road map, but we had a full tank of gas, so let's go."

Says ESPN executive editor John A. Walsh of Berman, "He's the image of the network. I think he's the first national sportscaster who spoke to his audience fan-to-fan. I remember reading one time about when [founding *New Yorker* editor Harold] Ross was at *Stars and Stripes*, he said that the paper's mission was to speak soldier-to-soldier. I always remembered that, and that's the way I feel about Berman."

"He's worshipful, and I don't say that in an entirely negative way," says Keith Olbermann, the host of MSNBC's nightly *Countdown*, formerly the dark prince of ESPN's signature telecast, *SportsCenter*, and someone who's known Berman since their days together at the Hackley School in Tarrytown, N.Y. "There's always been a kind of purity about him that served to protect the idea that he was a fan.

"My theory always was that the network could get along swimmingly without Chris, but it was seen there as exactly the opposite," Olbermann continues. "[ESPN thought] if they ever lost Chris Berman, the first show afterward would appear only in black and white, and then it would just go off the air. I never understood that. It was as if Chris was the ultimate good luck charm."

"I don't think anybody saw where ALL THIS WAS HEADED AT THE BEGINNING," says Berman.

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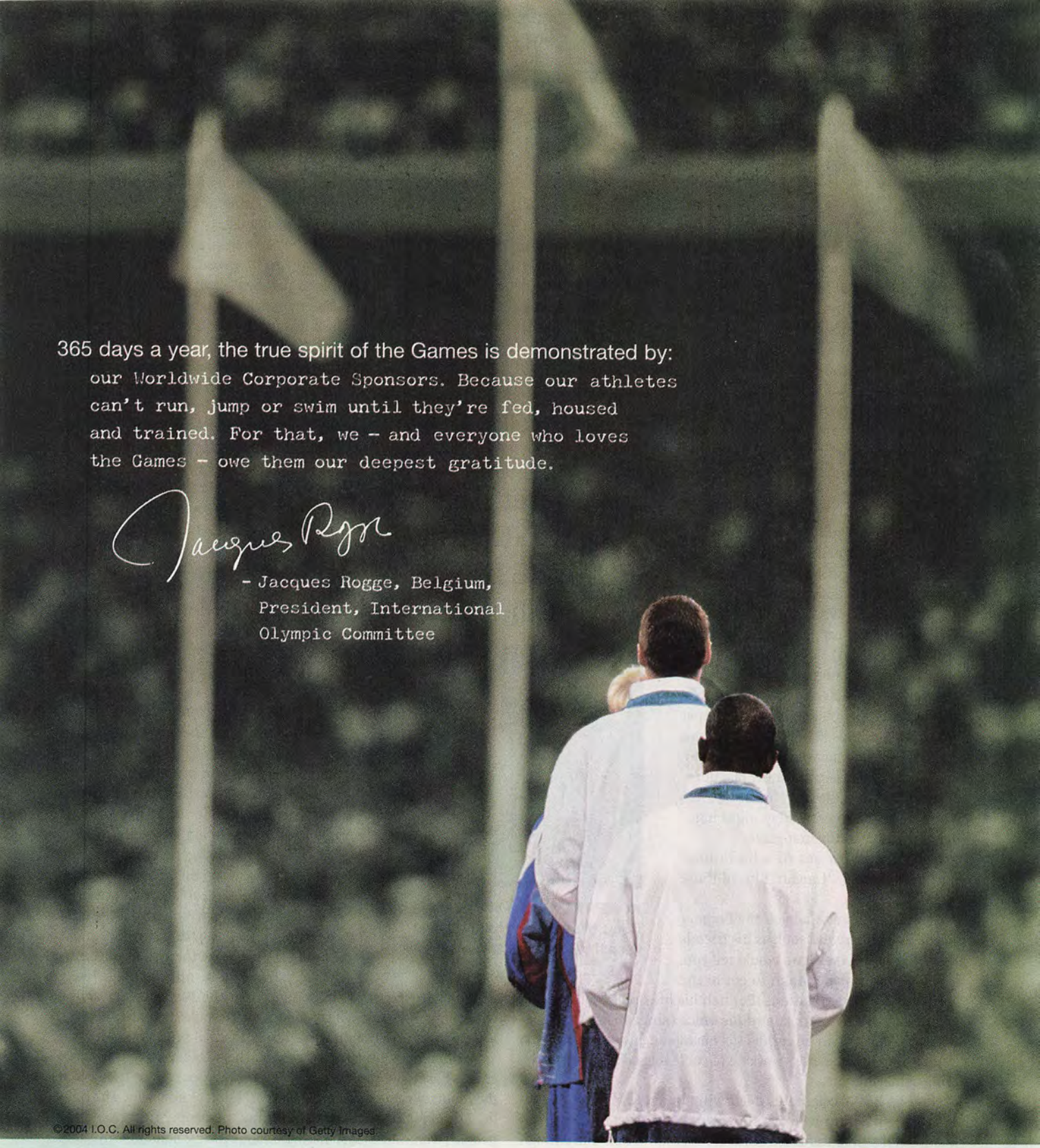
ON THE MAP The self-referential patter of ESPN anchors has made their Connecticut home a household name.

Chris Berman was right there when television broke the biggest promise it made to us after we invited it in: the promise to teach us about the world. Instead, it taught about the world-on-television. Politicians learned to be politicians-on-television so that they could later learn how to be president-on-television. It taught athletes how to be athletes-on-television, and it taught celebrity to everyone, even the people who talked about the athletes. It taught us how to live our lives to the rhythm of our internal play-by-play.

Chris Berman was right there to learn from it, a child of the old television come to prosper in the new, the line between sports and entertainment, between sports and journalism, between sports and everything else, hopelessly blurred in him, all the fine distinctions drowned out by the sheer ubiquity of his voice. Fifteen years ago, he was standing in Candlestick Park as the great plates of the earth shifted beneath the World Series and the grandstands began to sway. "You see," he says, "I knew the director of operations at Candlestick. He was a friend of mine. So we had him on. And *Nightline* wanted him, and he said, 'F--- *Nightline*. I'm with Boomer.' "

And then he's talking about how deeply the New England Patriots have bought into the philosophies that have brought them two of the last three Super Bowl championships. "I mean, they've really drunk the Kool-Aid there," he says, referencing a mass suicide about which we all learned on television. "What do you suppose it was?" he continues. "Goofy Grape? Jolly Olly Orange?"

ESPN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O.K., YOU'RE a sensible person, so he can make your head explode.

You've been rendered comatose by another *Monday Night Football* game. Cincinnati leads, say, Baltimore 10–3 at the half because it is an NFL rule that all *Monday Night Football* games are 10–3 at halftime. Anyway, Chris Berman comes on to do his halftime highlights package. At first you don't notice the faint, high-pitched whine in your ears.

"It's Danny (Erie) Kanell!"

(The whine gets louder.)

"FUMMMMMMBBBULLL!"

(Vibrations begin, slowly at first, but then increasing in frequency.)

"Frozen tunnnndraaaaaaaa. . . ."

(The world is a blur. And then. . . .)

"HE . . . COULD . . . GO . . . "

(My God. Fifty million people could be hearing this. Three-hundred-odd countries. They're hearing this in *Vietnam*. Haven't we done enough to them?)

". . . ALL THE WAY!"

(I saw this in *Scanners* once. Cover the bean dip, mother!)

It's a television homage, nearly all of it. The fumble call is Keith Jackson's, and the *grasso profundo* tribute to the sod of upper Wisconsin comes from the late John Facenda, the Delphic voice of vintage NFL Films epics. And, of course, the last utterance comes from the late Howard Cosell, who brought us the Monday-night highlights package in the first place.

"All that comes out of admiration," Berman explains. "I mean, I loved those guys."

Berman's 49 now, and yes, the Boomer is a boomer, heart and soul, as his friends Huey Lewis and the News would tell you, if you're not quick enough to get to the radio dial to change stations. For half his life he's been the most visible face, and the most audible voice (since his first year at ESPN, at least, when he earned his nickname, his voice has been louder than anyone else's), of one of cable television's most towering achievements.

Now, as ESPN celebrates itself with an endless series of specials (the silver anniversary show will be telecast on Sept. 6 at 8 p.m. ET), reminiscences, award shows, best-of lists and enough soft-focus valentines to make Ken Burns look like a director of splatter films, Chris Berman's voice is right there in the middle of most of it. The network's become such a brand name that it's hard to believe it ever was simply an acronym: *E*ntertainment and *S*ports *P*rogramming *N*etwork. And the *E* seems to be beating the everlasting *H* out of the *S* these days.

It has the ESPY Awards now, dedicated to the dubious proposition that actors and athletes have a great deal to say to one another and to the even more dubious proposition that, together, they have something to say to the rest of us. This is only the most blatant example of the way Entertainment has seeped into the schedule. Elsewhere, Junction Boys chase each other Around the Horn. On *SportsCenter*, still ESPN's flagship broadcast, an ordinary home run is even money to be greeted from the anchor desk by the *Nessun Dorma*, a passage from Ecclesiastes or Act III of *Timon of Athens*. The network is lodged dead center between the first two words of its birth name. Which is where Chris Berman has always been.

"Chris probably was the predicate for that entire [ESPN] culture," explains Olbermann, whose *SportsCenter*s with Dan Patrick a decade ago were the saturnine obverse of Berman's life-of-the-kegger approach. "It's instructive that he was doing that 10 or 12 years before I got there, and nobody else had gone off in a humorous direction.

"To be fair, though," Olbermann continues, "it's often said that when I'm in hell, or at least in purgatory, my maker will ask me, 'Didn't you think when you were doing this that somebody else might come along and not do it well? Go sit on the bench next to Dr. Oppenheimer.' Most of it is Dan's and my fault. Chris is [all about] superficial play-on-words levity. I mean, 'Bert Be Home Blyleven?' It ain't Thurber."

Nevertheless, as the voice and face of ESPN, Berman has become the loud, shambling exemplar of a boisterous revolution. Broadcast television raised the generation that abandoned it for cable. It taught that generation its media vocabulary. It schooled that generation in media literacy. Then, when that generation grew up and used those tools to dismantle all the old standards and practices, broadcast got caught flat-footed. Chris Berman's highlights package, then, is almost perfectly postmodern, although he likely wouldn't use the word, unless, of course, the 49ers one day draft a wideout named, say, Wiley Modern, who would thereafter become Wiley (Post) Modern on some ESPN football program or other.

Berman does bristle, however, at the suggestion that his success is based on gimmickry. "[The nicknames] get in the way of the [sportswriters], I think," he says. "I don't know why. The public, I think, takes me seriously. I think the people I cover and the people [who watch] take me seriously, which is actually why we're in this business, and so do the people I work for. So, if I'm good to those three groups, what a jealous couple of guys write—I can't affect that, you know? I mean, it pisses me off."

And it is a substantial bristle. At 6' 5" and a genuine 250, Berman dominates any room he's in, even the ones containing former football players. When he wants to make a point, he uses

"To Chris's everlasting credit, I have never seen any DISCERNIBLE CHANGE IN HIM," says Olbermann.

HOME TEAM At the ESPYs, (from left) Doug, Meredith and Kathy helped keep the Boomer relatively sane.

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both hands and his voice drops into a lower register that makes him sound like, of all people, comedian George Carlin.

"It's the ones that are lazy," he concludes, "or that formed an opinion 15 years ago and haven't bothered to pay attention [ever since]. I can't help that."

He's the son of a mechanical contractor and a woman who worked as a researcher at TIME magazine. He went from the Hackley School to Brown, from which he graduated with a degree in history in 1977. And, truth be told, he is a bona fide pop-culture catch basin, with a quicksilver ability to make connections between what he's seeing on the screen in front of him and what appears to be a limitless reservoir of otherwise useless knowledge.

By the old broadcast standards, none of that would have mattered. All that would have counted was that Chris Berman read scores decently and that his play-by-play skills were rudimentary at best. That would have likely doomed him to a life as a personality on some *Eyewitness News* set in Connecticut.

Which is about where he was at age 24, in October 1979, at Channel 30 in Waterbury, doing two shows every weekend for $23 a show. Reading the paper one morning, he noticed that, a little ways up the road in Bristol, some people were toying with the lunatic notion of an all-sports television channel. He called and was hired over the phone for $16,500 a year. He started on the 2:30 a.m. shift.

The place was quite literally a mud pit when Berman got there. (One famous episode has a producer named Fred Muzzy sinking into the muck up to his chest in a ditch on the ESPN lot. Had some coworkers not happened by, Muzzy might still be mired.) There was one building on the lot. The control room was a trailer, and the place was so rural and the security so lax that a skunk once wandered into the studio during a telecast and its aroma enlivened the premises for the next month.

From the start Berman was perfectly suited to ESPN. Like all cable television, ESPN began almost wholly as an improvisation. It ran dart competitions. It made a cult sport out of Australian Rules football. Cables failed. Cameras went dark. The job required someone who could maintain good humor at top volume in the middle of unmitigated catastrophe. Berman anchored. He did reports from the field. Most of all, he thrived.

"It was my first job doing sports full time," he says. "One of my goals was to get on TV doing sports full time by the time I was 25, and I did that. So I was young enough to think that this was a no-brainer, and I thought, Well, let's see where this goes. There were a lot of people like me [at ESPN], but it was still a scary thought at the time."

One thing that has kept Berman sane is that there isn't an ounce of artifice about him. Off-screen he is pretty much what he is on-screen—or as close as he can come to it. His office is cluttered to the gunwales with snapshots, pennants and assorted sports gewgaws, including three pieces of the turf from Green Bay's Lambeau Field. He still lives, like a Brown sophomore, on Diet Coke and adrenaline. He's kept his family—wife Kathy and children Meredith, 18, and Doug, 17—as far out of the limelight as any celebrity's family can be.

"It is to Chris's everlasting credit that I have never seen any discernible change in him," Olbermann muses. "It has never been with him, 'These sweetmeats are insufficient to my palate.' When I think of how other people in this business are, how unbearable some of them are, Chris isn't even on the same radar screen.

"Of course, I once said that to someone else, and Chris read it, and he said, 'I'm glad you like me.' I told him, 'Chris, I didn't say I liked you,' " says the famously prickly Olbermann. "He was really shocked by that."

"These [athletes] aren't enemies," says Berman. "WE GET INTO SPORTS BECAUSE WE LIKE THE PEOPLE."

BUDDY BOOMER As a reporter, Berman (interviewing the Eagles' Donovan McNabb) is pal, not pit bull.

But Berman's was the perfect personality for the burgeoning enterprise, which required good cheer as much as it did stamina. Gradually, along with the rest of the industry, ESPN learned that the nature of cable television militated against the monolithic uniformity of the old broadcast networks. On cable, it seemed, someone really could be Bert (Be Home) Blyleven. Berman had a broken field on which to run.

The nicknames came gradually, beginning with his appearances on *SportsCenter*, which became the fulcrum of the network's programming. (This was something of a surprise to those people who watched the show in the early days, when anchors dressed like Ukrainian headwaiters wandered around a set on which Ron Popeil would never have deigned to hack a tomato.) The first Boomerism is said to have been John Mayberry (RFD), hung on one of the premier power hitters of that era.

When a producer briefly banned the nicknames, something of a national dustup ensued, which was nothing if not a measure of how deeply ESPN—and Berman—had penetrated the marketplace. It was becoming quite clear that cable gave its stars far greater range in which to display their personalities than the broadcast networks did, and nowhere was the range greater than on ESPN. "We have a saying around here, all of us old guys," says Berman. " 'Could this guy have played here in the 1980s?' "

Throughout the '80s, as ESPN slowly became a force and Berman slowly became a star, he still measured success by the old broadcast standards. During the days when they shared an agent, Olbermann heard Berman more than once ask that the agent find him a job as a local sportscaster in a big market. Berman admits that in 1983 he thought seriously of taking a job at KGO in San Francisco, a city for which he maintains a serious passion. "I might've taken it," he says. "I went hard after that a couple of times. In '83 that would've been a six-figure salary,

DREW HALLOWELL/ICON SMI

like, you know, $125,000, and in 1983, I was making maybe $40,000 here." (Today Berman is nearing the end of a contract that pays him an estimated $1 million a year, and he's negotiating a new deal with the network.)

"But I started to think, O.K., now we're getting a little bigger, and I don't have to go bing-bing-bing from one job to another to get on TV in San Francisco," he says. "Up until then it was like baseball. Maybe you started in Single A in Peoria, and eventually, you're doing weekends in Hartford and then the Number 1 job in Pittsburgh and then, 'Ooh, I got the job in Philly.'

"But it changed here. I remember all these little checkpoints along the line. Some would be personal. I'd get recognized on the West Coast. I'd like to say I was real smart and figured this all out. But I don't think anybody, except maybe Ted Turner, saw where this was headed at the beginning."

By 1987 ESPN had developed as distinct an identity as any cable network, and Berman was a vital part of it. He did every sport. He did hundreds of promotional appearances for the network, much to the amazement of people like fellow anchor Bob Ley *(page 94)*, who, like Berman, had been present at the creation but whose personal style couldn't be more different. "I have no idea what they ask Boomer to do," says Ley. "Sponsor bulls---, all those welcomes and tapings. Whatever they're paying him, it ain't nearly enough. I mean, he just works his ass off, and not just on TV, either."

Still, it wasn't until 1987, when ESPN landed its first National Football League package and beefed up its own NFL programming

Anchors Array

Do you know all these *SportsCenter* teams? If so, for 25 years, you may have been watching too much TV

EARLY DAYS George Grande, Lee Leonard; Greg Gumbel, Bob Ley; Grande, Sharon Smith, Ley; Chris Berman, Gayle Gardner.

LATE '80s Tim Brando, John Saunders; Berman, Ley, Tom Mees; Berman, Ley; Charley Steiner, Bill Patrick.

'90s WISE GUYS Keith Olbermann, Dan Patrick; Karl Ravech, Craig Kilborn; Stuart Scott, Rich Eisen; Kenny Mayne, Dan Patrick.

NOW Chris McKendry, Mayne, Trey Wingo; Kevin Frazier, Scott Van Pelt; Rece Davis, Linda Cohn; Ley, Berman (anniversary).

ESPN; TOM FORD/ESPN (2); RICK LABRANCHE (8); JOHN ATASHIAN/ESPN; RICH ARDEN/ESPN (4)

to match, that Berman found the place where his enthusiasm ("Chris still cares who wins the games every Sunday," says Ley) and the persona he had created over the previous decade came into perfect convergence. It was television that had brought the games from out of the bleachers and onto the sofa. It was the NFL that had first adapted its product to the rising medium, and hence, while Chris Berman and every other fan of his age was growing up, slowly but surely, America had found itself with a new national pastime.

BECAUSE OF how pro football had used television to transform itself into the gravitational center of the American sports universe, the acquisition of a regular NFL package was the last great step that ESPN took out of its primordial ooze. And Berman, who, like the rest of his generation, had watched the NFL come to dominate televised sports, knew it instantly. "In '84 we'd say, Well, maybe we can get the NFL in about 15 years," he explains. "I mean, man, [now it came] after we had been around for eight years, and they're going to invent a Sunday-night package for us."

Between the *Sunday NFL Countdown* pregame show and the highly rated *NFL PrimeTime* package on Sunday nights, as well as his work through 1999 on the halftime highlights on the Monday-night games carried by ESPN's synergistic big brother, ABC, Berman has come as close to being the television voice of the NFL as anyone ever has been. And, unlike Cosell, who came nearly as close, he does not bridle at the thought.

On Sundays, Berman is omnipresent on the ESPN lot. He does the morning show and then retires with his partners to watch the day's games in a raucous session that generally gets Berman chaffed for his pronounced predilection to run with the favorites. "He is without question the biggest front-runner I know," says Chris Mortensen, who works with Berman on *NFL Countdown*. "We're all over him about that."

It is the NFL that lights Berman up. They are mostly NFL names that he drops, one after the other, as the conversation quickens. His good friend Bill Belichick up in New England. His very good friend Eddie DeBartolo Jr., once the owner of the 49ers out there in San Francisco, who's out of football now because he had to turn

But Serious Ley, Folks

Renowned for his reporting and anchor work, this esteemed veteran has found a niche outside the merriment

BOB LEY IS stranded. He's out on the North Carolina seacoast, and the first demihurricane of the season has come to call, and Ley's hanging out there on the edge of the continent as the tide rises and the winds do blow. "We're not worried," he says. "As long as the women and tequila hold out."

This would be a funny line in any case. But to anyone who's been paying attention over the past quarter century, hearing 49-year-old Bob Ley talk about women and tequila is roughly akin to having Alan Greenspan stop by to share his recipe for electric brownies. Over the past 25 years, as ESPN has expanded and exploded and boo-yahed its way into the heart of the national consciousness, Ley occasionally seems to have been dragooned into the post of hall monitor. "A friend of mine always tells me, 'You know, you really suck all the life out of sports,' " says Ley, who joined the network when it was three days old. "Some people are cursed to have a point of view that takes them toward the more serious stuff. I mean, I manage to anesthetize my brain and do *SportsCenter* for 2½ hours on Sunday, and I have fun doing it, but *SportsCenter* has evolved into something different from what it used to be."

THE CONSCIENCE Even anchoring in 1980 (left), the youthful Ley displayed his trademark gravitas.

Ley—"the General," to most longtime ESPN employees—wasn't always the sober conscience of the sporty things. In the early days he was so identified with ESPN that, in 1979, it was he who got a letter and a demo tape from an ambitious University of Dayton senior named Dan Patrick. For quite a while in the 1980s, he traveled the college basketball circuit with Dick Vitale, who had not yet achieved the market penetration of Dutch elm disease. Many were the cold, snowy mornings in which Ley and Vitale would be by themselves, sitting at a gate on the airport concourse in Syracuse. A lone writer would appear, and Vitale, who had gone six hours without having anyone else to talk to, would pounce. Ley would put his hat over his eyes and pretend to be asleep.

While Chris Berman got famous with his nicknames and his bombast, Ley was developing into the nearest thing ESPN had to Jim McKay. It was Ley, for instance, who held things together at the desk at Candlestick Park when the earthquake hit the Bay Area during the 1989 World Series. A decade later, though, Ley was thinking about leaving a network at which he increasingly felt he had no place. "If someone had come around with the right offer then," Ley says, "I would have actively considered it."

In 1999, however, ESPN executives approached Ley to expand his issue-oriented series called *Outside the Lines,* which premiered in the mid-'80s. Ley jumped at the chance. *OTL* began as a weekly show on April 1, 2000, and on May 12, 2003, went nightly, telecast after the late *SportsCenter.* Ley has followed stories to Vietnam, investigating conditions in athletic-shoe factories, and to Russia, where, while reporting on sports there after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ley and his producer nearly got stampeded during a Boris Yeltsin rally. The show mixes in lighter material as well, such as the feature this year on the rise of sports websites, in which viewers met people who differ from some of the higher forms of fungi only in their ability to type. "There are stories where we make a conscious effort to go a little light," Ley says. "We're not simon pure."

He has stayed in the background during ESPN's ongoing celebration of itself this year. "The best memories," he says, "are the ones that you never could put on the air." Instead, he's on the Outer Banks, waiting for the storm to blow itself out. Could be worse. Could be Syracuse, and the high wind could be Dickie V.—C.P.P.

ESPN (LEFT); MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/DEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY

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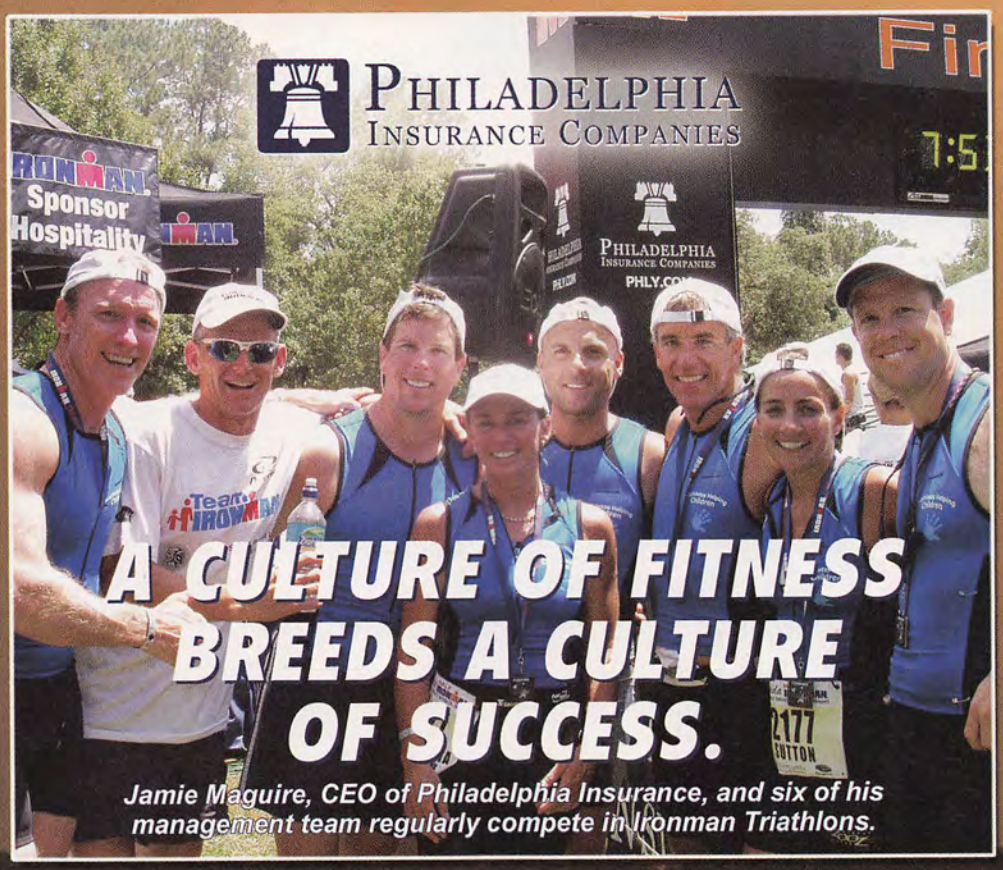

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state's evidence against former governor Edwin Edwards in a political scandal that was messy even by the standards of Louisiana. In 1991 Berman accepted a 49ers championship ring from DeBartolo, only to return it after taking some flak for it, within and outside ESPN. "I know one thing," Berman says of DeBartolo. "The league misses him."

Berman has become a creature of the league, and it shows. Despite all the bombast, and the nicknames, and the genuine bonhomie, he walks a professional line that can thin almost to disappearing, if he's not very careful. "Look," says Mortensen, a prize-winning newspaper reporter before he joined ESPN in 1991, "when you're a so-called reporter like me, walking into this situation, you're accustomed to taking a different approach. Chris makes no bones about it. He's a fan."

"You know," Berman explains, "these [athletes and executives] aren't enemies to us. We get into sports because we like the games and we like the people who play them. Maybe what we're supposed to be, to quote Woody Allen from *Broadway Danny Rose*, is friendly but never familiar.

"It almost goes to, you know, 'Are you a journalist?' With the stuff [I] learn all the time, it isn't like, 'I have a scoop' or anything like that. I may not have a scoop, but I [get it] right. I mean, ask the people I work with. Go ask Belichick or [Philadelphia Eagles coach] Andy Reid. My job is different from the guys at the network who have to be pit bulls. I mean, I've got information that can sink countries. I just don't need to bury banana republics every day. It's not my M.O."

The question of Berman's friendship with some of those about whom he bellows on a Sunday seems these days almost as quaint as asking whether or not he has rabbit ears atop his TV or an antenna on the roof. The question has always been central to the hiring of ex-athletes and ex-coaches as commentators, a practice that nearly drove Cosell mad, but one which ESPN has refined into high art. Moreover, the question isn't even unique to Berman, to ESPN, or to sports television, for all that.

In August, Joe Scarborough, a former Republican congressman turned MSNBC host, showed up at a rally at which he was seen applauding President George W. Bush. In response to complaints, MSNBC president Rick Kaplan split a preposterously delicate hair, stating that there were different rules for "opinion hosts" than there were for "news hosts." Elsewhere, Fox News has as one of its principal anchors Tony Snow, a former speechwriter for the first President Bush. And within the same conglomerate that employs Berman, ABC handed its Sunday morning news program over to George Stephanopolous, who once spun for President Bill Clinton. On that same show one of the regular analysts—the Chris Mortensen of the Beltway, as it were—is columnist George Will, who, in 1980, just as Chris Berman was establishing himself in Bristol, once famously prepped Ronald Reagan for a debate with President Jimmy Carter, and then turned up on television essentially praising his own handiwork. In fact, the television news universe is now replete with former flacks, hacks and political quacks, all performing in reportorial drag, and on issues infinitely more important than who might be starting at running back this weekend for the 49ers. Given that unruly menagerie elsewhere, the question of whether Chris Berman is a "journalist" seems pretty much like locking the barn after the horse was stolen, then escaped from his captors and set himself up in life with a new job pulling a beer truck in St. Louis.

Perhaps what's left is the performance. Berman says he'll know it's time to leave for the land he already owns on Maui when his references to the Rolling Stones fall dumbly on hip-hop ears. Already there are signs that ESPN is getting away from him a bit. He claims not to have seen an NBA game in 10 years, and at this year's major league All-Star Game, when *SportsCenter* led with the trade of Shaquille O'Neal to the Miami Heat instead of baseball, an open microphone caught Berman telling broadcast partner Harold Reynolds, "Now you know why I don't watch our show anymore." And there's an awful lot of ESPN programming now aimed at kids who look at Chris Berman the way he once looked at Ray Scott.

"I'll be gone quicker than people think," he says. "I still see Willie Mays, falling down in centerfield. But I do know this, I'm not going to sour on sports. I'm going to watch the games. I could walk right now—for about a year and a half, and then I wouldn't know what to do."

"I'll be gone quicker than people think," Berman says. "BUT I'M NOT GOING TO SOUR ON SPORTS."

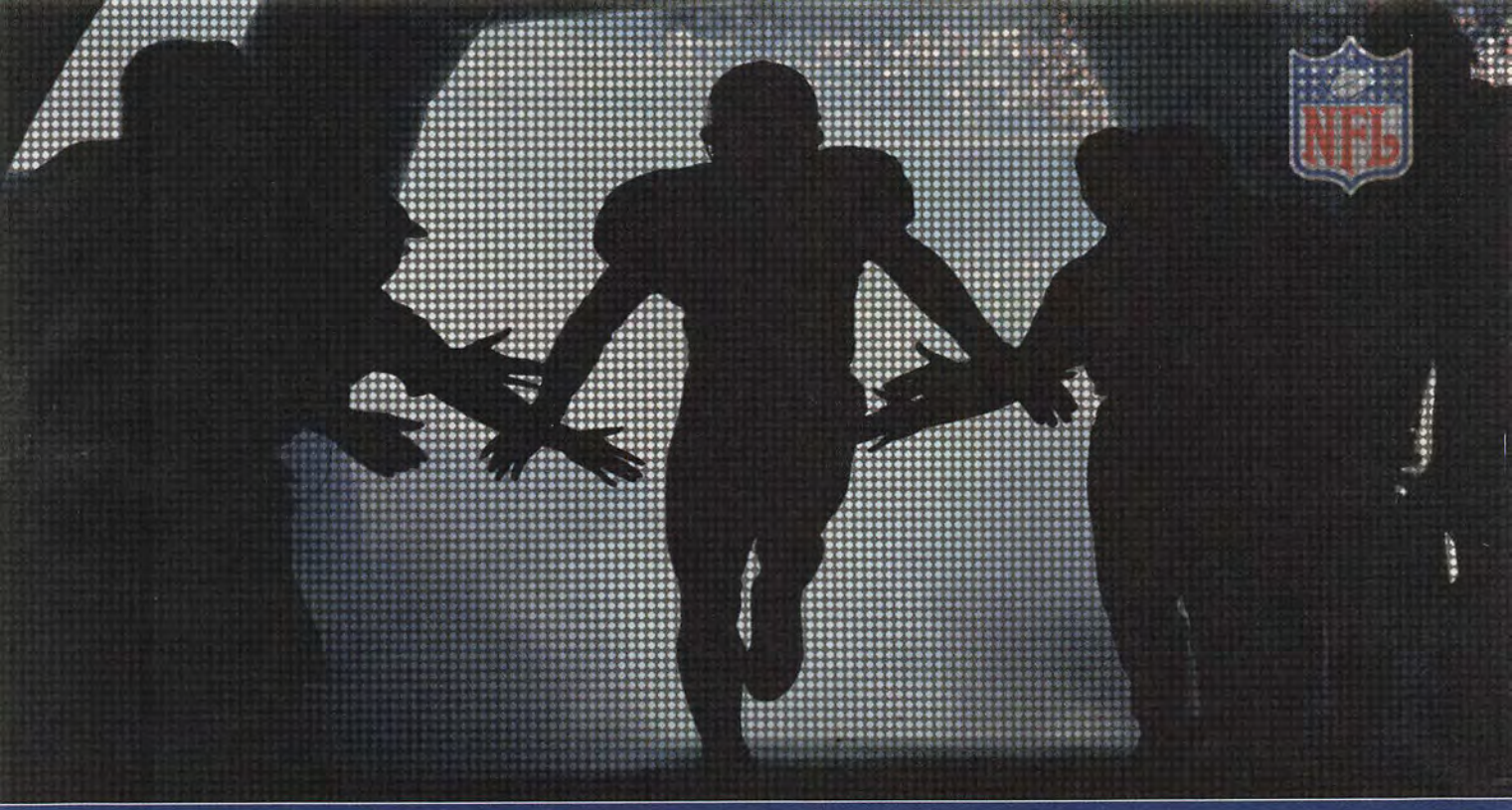
POINT MAN During taping of ESPN's 25th anniversary special, Boomer was his customary expressive self.

SO WHEN did it happen? It never stopped happening, not since the day when all of us, even the Bermans of Rye, N.Y., invited the thing into our living room after it promised to behave like the rest of the furniture, and then it didn't. We are passing out of that first generation now, out of the generation that learned about cable television by watching broadcast television.

"Nobody here draws a distinction between cable television and over-the-air television except people as old as me," says Bob Ley, who's been carried along on the great arc of it himself. "*We* recognize that the world is changing."

And perhaps that will be Chris Berman's legacy—that he remembers when television pulled its programming out of the sweet, free air, and that he's one of the first people who learned his life's work 500 channels at a time, the way we all would come to learn so many things, good and bad, and keep learning them today. Chris Berman learned his lesson well, and he learned how to be a television star from the only teacher that really counts. He learned it from television. □

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/DEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY



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Honoring Arnie

In celebration of Arnold Palmer and the win that launched his groundbreaking career, a historic event unites U.S. Amateur champions and raises millions for education **BY ALEC MORRISON**

ARNOLD PALMER HAD PLENTY OF FAITH IN HIS GOLF game when he arrived at the Country Club of Detroit for the 1954 U.S. Amateur Championship. But he was considered a dark horse at best in a field crowded with plenty of older, wiser, wealthier players whose résumés far outstripped that of a 24-year-old paint salesman a few months out of Wake Forest. These were men whose ranks he contemplated joining; if he couldn't find the means to finance turning pro, a life as both businessman and competitive amateur golfer sounded pretty good. A week and 178 holes of golf later, on Aug. 28, 1954, Palmer's prospects looked decidedly different.

He swept his eight matches in Detroit, clambering past big names and pre-tournament favorites like Frank Stranahan and Ed Meister, whom Palmer outlasted in a grueling 39-hole semifinal. The next day, Palmer won a David-and-Goliath final by beating debonair Bob Sweeny, a 43-year-old investment banker with a British Amateur title to his credit. Palmer's parents drove through the night from his hometown of Latrobe, Pa., to watch his last two matches, and even his stern, stoic father clapped a proud hand on Palmer's shoulder. "I don't know if I've ever felt as much happiness on a golf course," he wrote in his 1999 memoir, *A Golfer's Life*.

The victory, 50 years ago this month, heralded a new star. With his charisma, confidence and steely will, the blue-collar Palmer reached a golfing audience beyond the upper crust. Today's PGA Tour pros can thank him for their TV deals, purses and galleries. The King would win 62 PGA titles, including seven majors, with a cadre of supporters known as Arnie's Army lining every fairway.

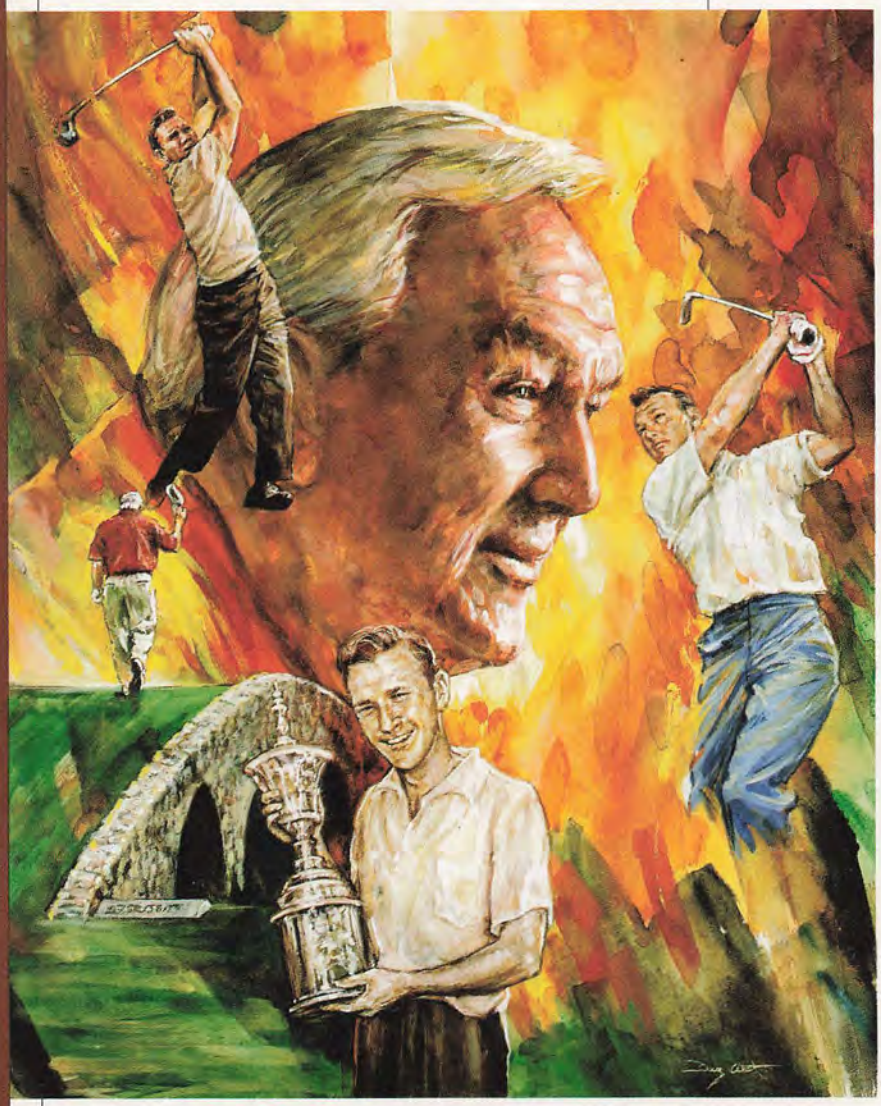

ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG WEST

Without his Amateur win in Detroit, none of this might have happened. He's long seen that week as a professional and personal turning point, a great opportunity on which he built the rest of his life. By the end of 1954, his tourney invites multiplied; he met, proposed to and married Winnie Walzer, who would stay by his side until she passed away 45 years later; signed an endorsement deal with Wilson; and became a pro. "That turning point started in August and ended up on Dec. 20, 1954, when I married Winnie and decided to go on tour," says Palmer, now 74.

In celebration of his Amateur win and the career that followed, he'll return to the Country Club Aug. 29–30 for the Turning Point Invitational, an event that will raise money to create the Arnold Palmer Education Fund. Tournament co-chairmen Clark Durant, also the founding chairman and CEO of Detroit's Cornerstone Schools, and former Ford Motor Co. CEO and chair Harold "Red" Poling have planned the largest-ever reunion of U.S. Amateur winners. "Never before have this many champions come back to play an event together," Durant says. Thirty of them, including this year's, will be in Detroit for a pro-am tournament and golden anniversary dinner.

The recreational golfers competing in the Turning Point will play in fivesomes with the likes of 2004 Masters champion Phil Mickelson (the 1990 Amateur winner; *The King And I*, next page), two-time major champion Mark O'Meara (1979) and CBS broadcaster Lanny Wadkins (1970). Their

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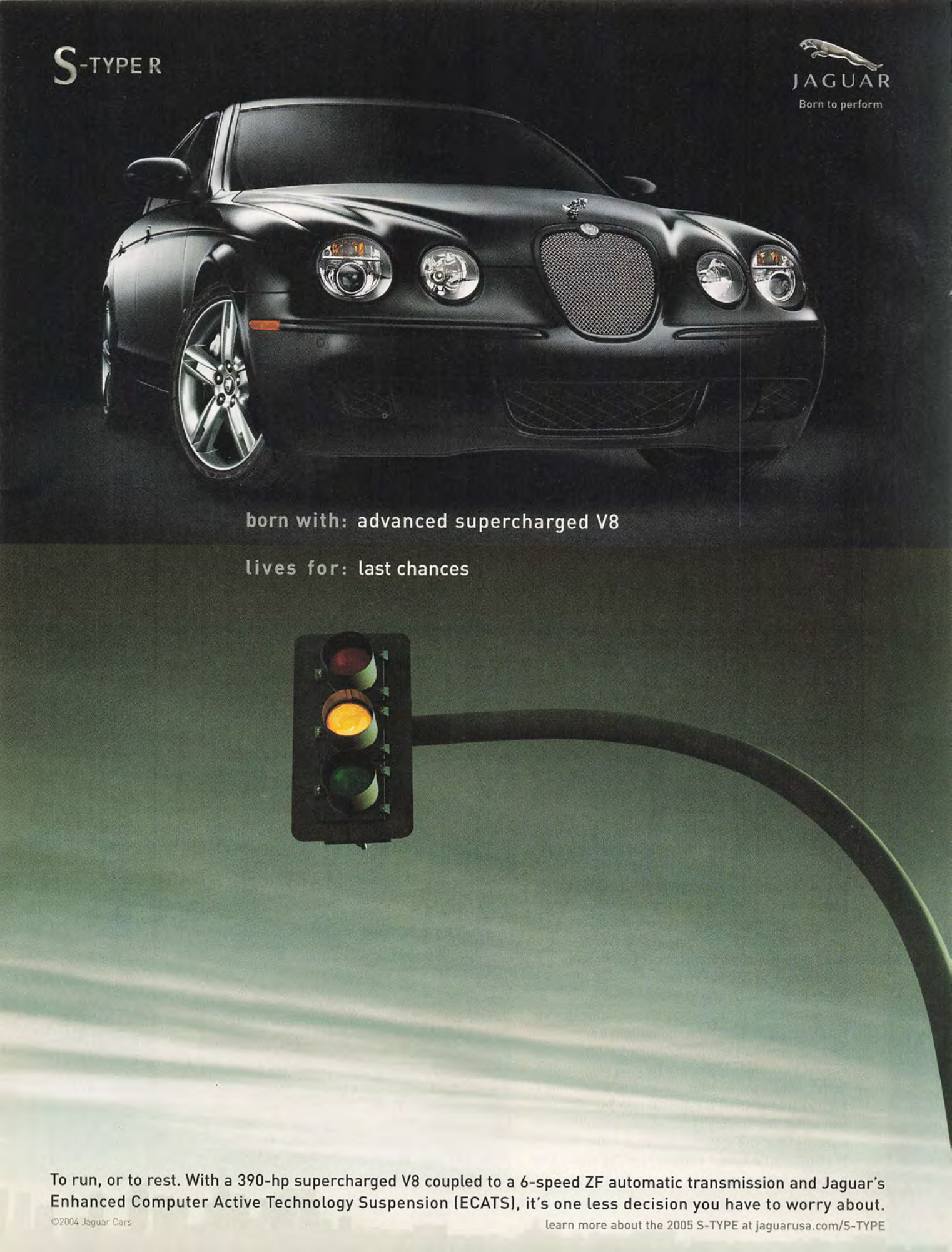

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The King And I

BY PHIL MICKELSON

PLAYING GOLF growing up and when I came out on the PGA Tour, the person I tried to emulate most was Arnold Palmer. Here's an example of why: At the 1994 U.S. Open, early in my career, I saw Arnold spend an hour and a half in the volunteer tent signing about 1,000 autographs. Afterward, people were thanking him, but he said, "You guys spent hours on end helping out with this event, and yet you don't have a chance to go out and see any golf. I wanted to come in here and let you know how much we appreciate what you do."

That shows why we professional golfers all should aspire to be like him, on and off the course. He looks people in the eye and treats everyone with respect. He does his best to accommodate the fans. And one of the greatest opportunities pro athletes have is to help improve the lives of others. We do it through Tour charities, and some of us have our own foundations. Arnold has been the model for that too.

Winning the Masters in Arnold's last appearance at the tournament added to the thrill. After that, a lot of people compared my style of play to Arnold's charismatic, go-for-broke approach. I couldn't be more flattered.

PGA Tour star Mickelson, shown at the 1990 U.S. Amateur, is one of 30 Amateur champions who will participate in the Turning Point Invitational.

presence testifies to both the prestige of the U.S. Amateur, which Palmer calls the most important amateur tournament in the world, and their enduring respect for a legend. "The U.S. Amateur was a major stepping stone in my career, one of my very greatest memories," Mickelson says. "I won at Cherry Hills, where Arnold had one of the greatest U.S. Open wins of all time, and I drove the first green in one of my matches like he did the final day [in 1960]." Palmer expects to create some new memories when he joins his fellow champs. "People who have played and won in the Amateur, they've all turned out to be pretty great players," he says.

When he committed to playing the Turning Point, Palmer had no idea the event would take on such grand dimensions. The gala weekend has grown from an idea suggested to Durant by a friend two years ago: Durant, a Country Club of Detroit member, could combine the approaching 50th anniversary of Palmer's win with a fundraiser benefitting the kids at Cornerstone.

In 2003, after preliminary conversations, Palmer invited longtime friend Poling and Durant to Latrobe, where they told him about Cornerstone: The four schools serve 800 urban students in an intimate environment. Parents take active roles, and community leaders form partnerships for further mentoring. Durant told Palmer he could help create a turning point in children's lives—words that immediately resonated. Palmer had written a reflection on his Amateur win called *The Turning Point*, which he pulled from a shelf. "I had not seen this before; it was a privately printed little book," Durant says. "It was a God moment. I don't know any other way to say it."

Palmer agreed to come—for free—leaving Poling and Durant to build the event. They expected mass regrets when they invited former Amateur winners but instead found widespread enthusiasm. An original score, *The Fanfare to Champions*, was commissioned to be performed by members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at the dinner. Durant also secured permission, rarely granted, to give tournament players a 10-CD set called *Together*, by pianist Carl Doy with members of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. To aid fund-raising efforts, Palmer's *The Turning Point* has been revised for public release. (*A Turning Point For Kids*, below.)

From the dinner and the recreational entries (limited to 100 participants, plus the former Amateur champs), Turning Point's organizers hope to raise $5 million for the Palmer Education Fund. The World Golf Foundation's First Tee of Michigan, Cornerstone and other Detroit-area schools will benefit.

Until they met, Durant couldn't have known how well Cornerstone's mission would dovetail with Palmer's own interests. The golfer has given generously to causes that support children and education, and he counts his college days among the best of his life. "Four years at Wake Forest were very important for my future," he says. "I still feel strongly that education isn't just reading, writing and arithmetic. It's all the other things that go along with being in school, learning to meet people, talking to them and learning more about your own personal existence."

The experiences Palmer had at Wake and in his early 20s prepared him for the fateful '54 Amateur, which in turn opened the gates to the iconic career that followed. "Good gracious, I played a lot of players [at the 1954 Amateur]," he says. "I suppose that winning and beating those people, that gave me the confidence I needed to make my life playing the professional game." Amid the Turning Point Invitational's fanfare and history, a similar sense of possibility will thrive for children five decades removed from Palmer's first great triumph. "This is about something beyond ourselves, and it's a giving of oneself to allow another to have a more abundant life," Durant says. "This is truly a historic gathering."

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A Turning Point For Kids

THE TOURNAMENT commemorating Arnold Palmer's 1954 U.S. Amateur win, which he calls the turning point in his life, aims to provide a turning point for kids by raising $5 million for urban education. All Palmer fans can chip in through sales of *The Turning Point*, the account of Palmer's '54 Amateur victory that's seeing its first wide release (with a foreword by Phil Mickelson), and *Together*, 10 CDs and a book showcasing the highly acclaimed work of pianist Carl Doy and members of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. For information about the book, event or donations, visit **turningpointinvitational.org**. For *Together*, go to **togethercollection.com/turningpoint**.

Created by the SPORTS ILLUSTRATED® Editorial Projects Department: Brad Young, Director; Tom Carling, Carling Design, Inc., Designer; Sarah Lorge Butler, Writer; Alec Morrison, Writer-Reporter; Jordan Hyman, Researcher; Maria Burns, Editorial Assistant.

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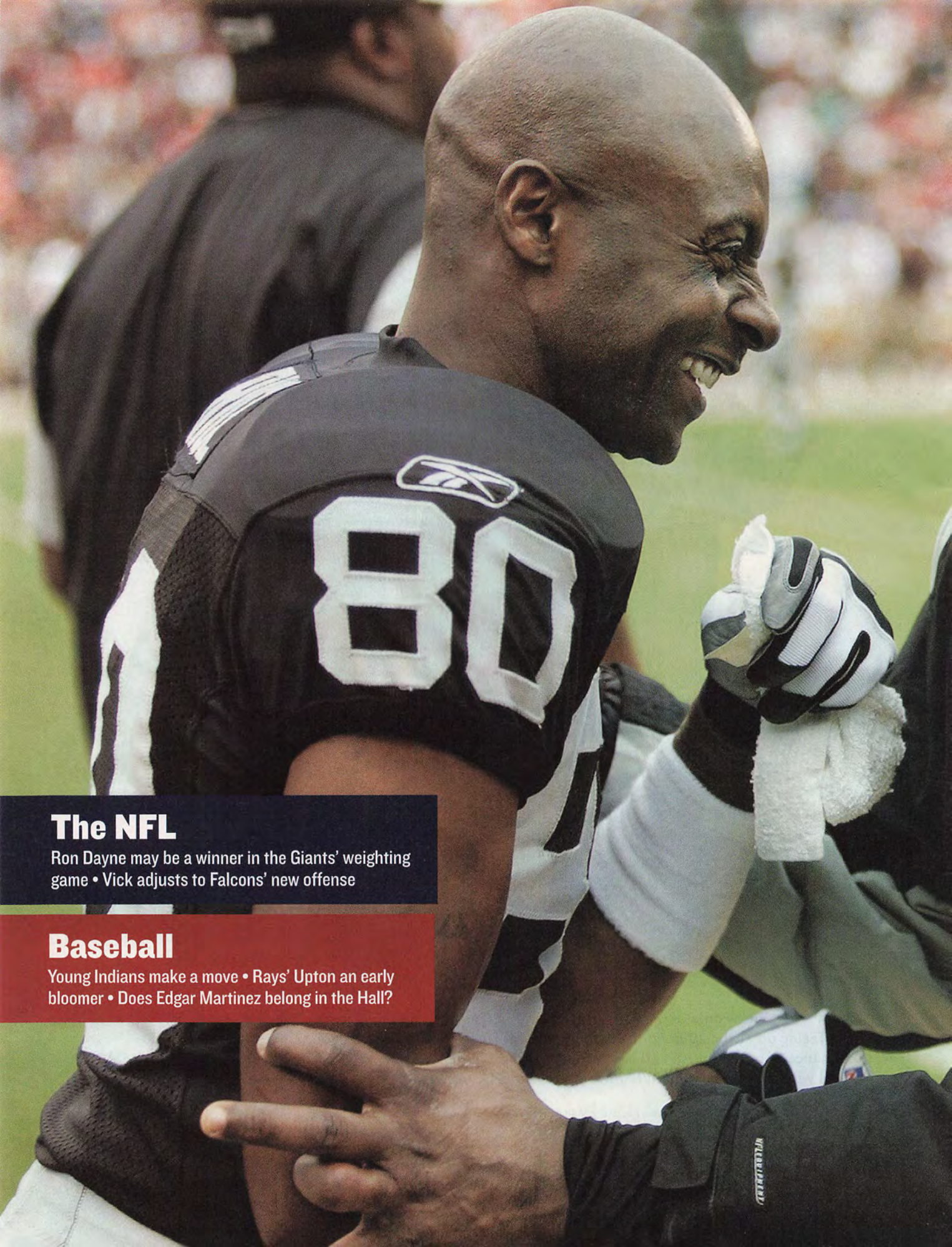
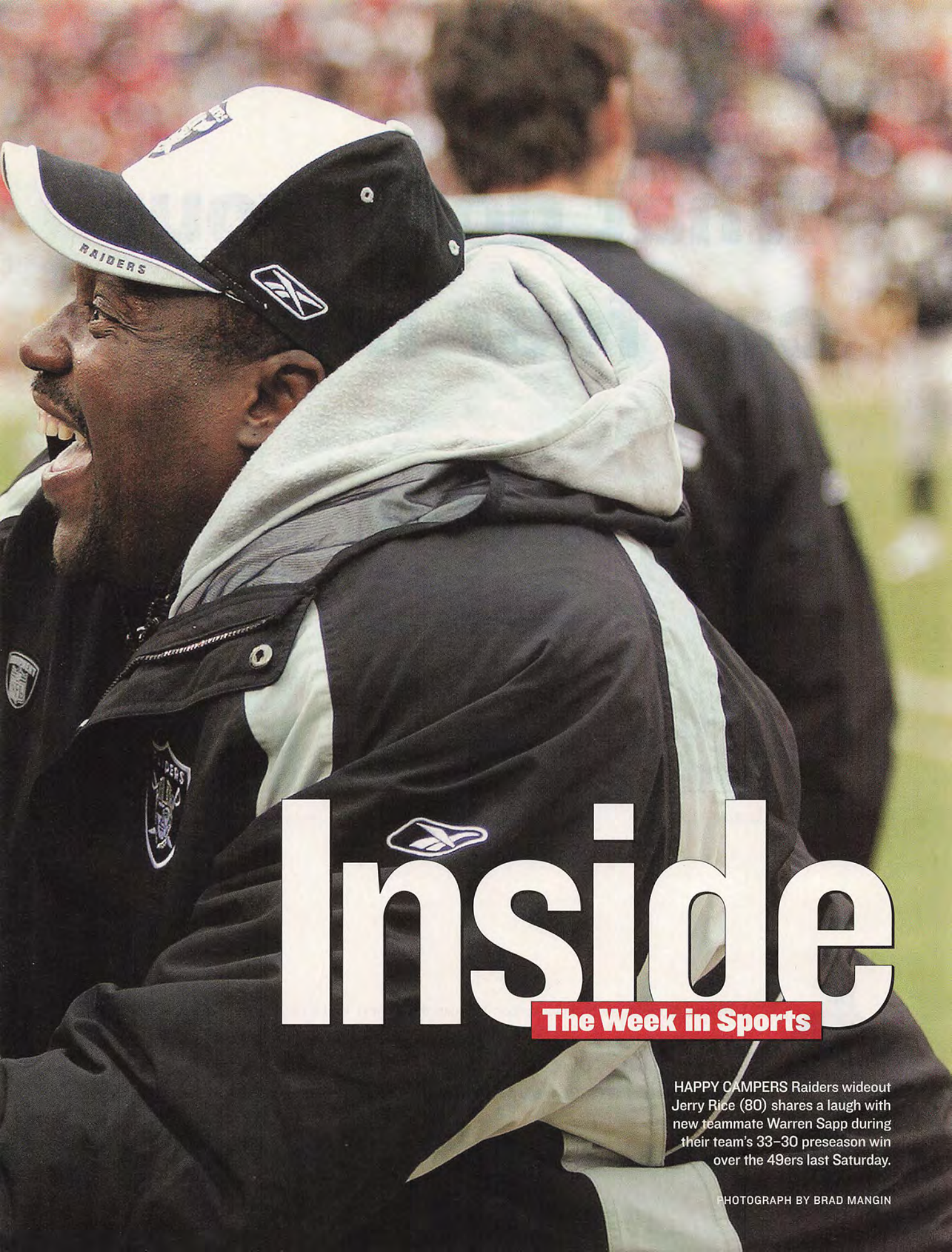


The NFL

Ron Dayne may be a winner in the Giants' weighting game • Vick adjusts to Falcons' new offense

Baseball

Young Indians make a move • Rays' Upton an early bloomer • Does Edgar Martinez belong in the Hall?



Inside

The Week in Sports

HAPPY CAMPERS Raiders wideout Jerry Rice (80) shares a laugh with new teammate Warren Sapp during their team's 33–30 preseason win over the 49ers last Saturday.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAD MANGIN

What does your car fear most?

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Dayne showed power and speed on his first scoring run.

Weighing In

A trim Ron Dayne looked like his old self in the Giants' win over K.C.

by Jeffri Chadiha

ONE DAY last February new Giants coach Tom Coughlin stared into the eyes of the portly running back sitting across from him and asked a simple question. Coughlin wanted to know how much Ron Dayne weighed. When Dayne, mostly a disappointment since being selected in the first round of the 2000 draft, said he weighed 275 pounds, Coughlin gave him an ultimatum: Shed 30 pounds by the team's minicamp in May, or don't bother showing up.

When he took the field for the Giants' preseason opener against the Chiefs last Friday night, the 5' 10" Dayne weighed 234 pounds. Then, with most eyes focused on the quarterback battle between Kurt Warner and rookie first-round draft pick Eli Manning, Dayne stole the show, running for 118 yards and two touchdowns on 11 carries in a 34–24 New York win.

At least three defenders slammed into Dayne on his first touchdown run, but he bounced outside and sprinted for a 29-yard score. On the Giants' next possession he raced untouched for a 67-yard score. On both runs he displayed a shocking burst as he pulled away from his pursuers. "I kidded him after the second one," said New York running back Tiki Barber. "I told him I might not have been able to run away from the defense like that."

Granted, this was only one preseason game—against a suspect Chiefs defense at that—but it's hard to ignore Dayne's performance. In his first four seasons Dayne, the 1999 Heisman Trophy winner, ran for only 1,888 yards, and last season he got so deep in then coach Jim Fassel's doghouse that he didn't dress for a single game. The rap on Dayne was that he was soft and slow to hit the hole.

It didn't seem likely that Coughlin, a disciplinarian, would have much use for Dayne either. But last January, Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi presented Coughlin with a stack of Dayne's game films and asked the coach to take a look. "I didn't give him any propaganda," says Accorsi. "I just asked him to see for himself." Coughlin reviewed tapes of Dayne's rookie year—when he gained a career-high 770 yards—and saw promise. He called Accorsi immediately and asked why Dayne hadn't played more.

In Jacksonville, Coughlin enjoyed success with bigger backs like Natrone Means, James Stewart and Fred Taylor, and he thought Dayne had similar potential. In fact, even before the breakout last Friday, Coughlin mentioned Dayne as being a key figure in the Giants' attack. "Ron has really given himself a chance to be successful," Coughlin says. "He's taught himself to eat properly. He's kept his weight down. And he's shown he has some speed to the outside. He deserves the opportunity he's getting."

BILL KOSTROUN/AP

Atlanta's New Offense

Falcons Will Let Vick Fly

Anyone concerned that new Falcons coach Jim Mora is taking the ball out of quarterback Michael Vick's hands by installing the West Coast offense can rest easy. "People ask how we're going to make Mike fit into the West Coast offense, but my thinking is that we're trying to make our offense fit Mike," Mora says. "We're not going to ask him to do things he can't do. Mike has to run. He has to be on the edge. We'd be idiots to change his game."

Mora, the former San Francisco defensive coordinator, says Atlanta's offense will include aspects of the 49ers' passing game and the Broncos' running attack. Starting in early March, Vick spent three hours a day studying his new system with offensive coordinator Greg Knapp and quarterbacks coach Mike Johnson. And if Vick had any reservations about the change, those disappeared after he received an encouraging word from former 49ers quarterback Steve Young last January. "He's Mike's guy," Mora says. "When Steve Young called to say this offense would be great for him, that really got Mike going." □

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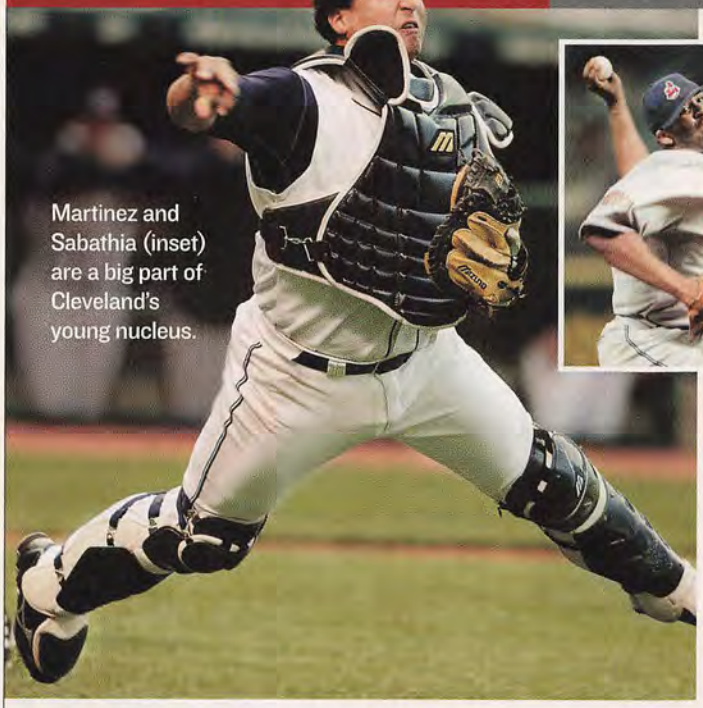
Photo: David Sacks/Getty Images



Martinez and Sabathia (inset) are a big part of Cleveland's young nucleus.

Early Risers

The Indians are ahead of schedule in their run at the AL Central leader

by Albert Chen

LIKE A Wall Street executive, Indians general manager Mark Shapiro cites Japanese business models to explain his management philosophy and keeps books such as *The Mind of the CEO* in his office. In 2002, his first year on the job, Shapiro was focused on rebuilding for the long term when he stripped the team of high-priced veterans, most notably free-agent first baseman Jim Thome (whom Shapiro chose not to re-sign) and right-hander Bartolo Colon (whom he traded to the Expos), and began loading up on young talent. Realistically, Cleveland wasn't expected to contend again until 2005.

So much for his three-year plan. With a team built on a shoestring budget—the Indians' $34.3 million payroll is the fourth-lowest in the majors—Cleveland is making a run at the postseason *this* year. After taking two of three games from the Twins last weekend at Jacobs Field, the Indians (63–56) had won 10 of their last 12 to move within two games of American League Central–leading Minnesota. Last year Cleveland lost 94 games and finished 22 games out of first.

"Nobody was counting on us to be where we are," says 37-year-old shortstop Omar Vizquel, the graybeard in a clubhouse in which the average age of the other starters is 27. "I thought we had a good team, but I wasn't expecting this. I thought [contending] would take a little longer."

Despite losing cleanup hitter Milton Bradley, who clashed with manager Eric Wedge in spring training and was traded to the Dodgers for two minor leaguers, the Indians' offense is the main reason for their rapid rise in the two months. With an aggressive approach at the plate—"Our guys don't go up there to walk," says hitting coach Eddie Murray—Cleveland led the majors in runs scored (663), ranked second in on-base percentage (.357) and fourth in hitting (.282).

"These guys are swinging," says Minnesota centerfielder Torii Hunter. "I'm standing in the outfield wondering where to play these guys. They're hitting the ball all over the park."

The Indians boast a balanced lineup with six regulars hitting above .280, including catcher Victor Martinez, who in his first full season in the majors was hitting .298 with 19 home runs and 89 RBIs. First baseman Travis Hafner, who replaced Thome in 2003, was putting up MVP numbers: .320 batting average, .596 slugging percentage, 23 home runs and 91 RBIs.

The rotation has also been stronger than expected, with lefthanders Cliff Lee and C.C. Sabathia and righthander Jake Westbrook a combined 30–15. Only the bullpen, which ranked last in the AL with a 5.25 ERA and had blown 25 saves (tied for the most in the majors with the Reds), has been suspect.

The Indians' fratlike clubhouse buzzes with energy before every home game, with players watching a scene from the movie *Slap Shot* to pump themselves up. And with 10 games remaining between the Indians and the Twins, including three this weekend at Minnesota, the division race is just warming up.

"We're happy to leave here," Minnesota lefthander Terry Mulholland said, after

Three Up

Atlanta Braves
They were 5½ games out of first in the NL East on June 17, but thanks to a 21–8 record from the All-Star break through Sunday, they had a commanding eight-game lead.

Orlando Hernandez, RHP, Yankees
Since joining the Yankees' rotation on July 11, El Duque was 5–0 with a 2.08 ERA in his first seven starts.

Sidney Ponson, RHP, Orioles
After going 3–12 in the first half of the season, he was 5–0 with a 3.24 ERA in six starts since the All-Star break.

Three Down

Rangers rotation
Texas starters had a 5.87 ERA in their last 44 games through Sunday and were a big reason why the team had blown a 4½-game lead in the AL West.

Lance Berkman, LF, Astros
After slugging 14 home runs in April and May combined, he had knocked only four balls over the fence in 217 at bats.

Florida Marlins
The defending champs were 28–38 after May 30 largely because of an underachieving offense, which ranked ninth in the National League in hitting (.263).

RON SCHWANE/AP; BRIAN BAHR/GETTY IMAGES (INSET)

the Twins escaped with a 10-inning, 4–2 victory on Sunday. "There are a lot of games left, and I think both of these teams are going to be playing some fun baseball."

Tampa's Rookie Shortstop

B.J. Upton a Ray of Hope

Shortly after the Devil Rays selected him with the second pick in the 2002 draft, shortstop B.J. Upton, then a 17-year-old about to graduate from Greenbrier Christian Academy in Chesapeake, Va., was asked to describe what kind of player he was. "Ever seen Derek Jeter play?" Upton replied without hesitation.

At 19, Upton looks like the majors' version of LeBron.

Now he's getting a chance to back up his words. On Aug. 1 Upton was called up from Triple A Durham, making him, at 19, the youngest player in the majors. And after hitting .351 with two doubles, a triple and six runs scored in his first 10 games, Upton was drawing raves throughout the majors.

"We haven't had anybody like LeBron James in baseball," says Brewers general manager Doug Melvin. "Maybe Upton is the guy. He's very young and talented. He could be the next star-quality player in the big leagues."

The 6' 3", 180-pound Upton is a five-tool talent with tremendous speed and good discipline at the plate. His 73 walks in the minors last year were the most by any player in the Tampa organization. In 69 games at Durham before being called up, he hit .311 with 12 homers, 36 RBIs and 17 stolen bases. Despite his age, the Devil Rays don't expect Upton to be overwhelmed in the majors. "What impressed me the most during spring training was the fact that he thought he belonged," says manager Lou Piniella. "That's always a good indicator. He looked comfortable out there."

Upton grew up idolizing Jeter—at Greenbrier, he wore the Yankee's uniform number 2—and has been on the fast track to the majors since Tampa Bay gave him a $4.6 million signing bonus after the draft. (An all-around outstanding athlete, Upton was a quarterback in high school and was recruited by Georgia and Tennessee to play football.)

Upton, 22-year-old centerfielder Rocco Baldelli and 23-year-old leftfielder Carl Crawford give the Devil Rays, who were 54–64 at week's end and on pace to break the franchise record for wins in a season (69), a promising young nucleus. What's more, another phenom could be on the way: 18-year-old rightfielder Delmon Young, the No. 1 pick in the 2003 draft, was hitting a team-high .308, with 99 RBIs and a .518 slugging percentage for Class A Charleston.

To be sure, Upton is still a raw talent—he committed three errors in his first 10 games with Tampa Bay—but Piniella and his staff are being patient. "All we have to do," says Piniella, "is let him get some work with [third base coach] Tom Foley, an excellent infield instructor; get his name in the lineup; and get out of the way and watch him play." □

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Tom Verducci's View

IS EDGAR A HALL OF FAMER?

Yankees closer **Mariano Rivera** calls him the toughest hitter he's ever faced, and scores of other players and managers call him the epitome of a professional hitter, but will the baseball writers vote **Edgar Martinez** *(right)* into the Hall of Fame? The game's greatest designated hitter announced last week that this will be his final season, touching off a debate about the merits of the DH that will heat up even more when Martinez goes on the 2010 Hall ballot. He faces an uphill climb.

Martinez, 41, was the most respected righthanded hitter in baseball during his prime and has always been a class act. But in his 18-year career he did not come close to 3,000 hits (he had 2,213 through Sunday), had only six 100-RBI seasons and was among the top 10 in MVP voting only twice. He's borderline in my early book, but deserves strong consideration if only because his peers held him in high esteem as a master of his craft. Such regard is more persuasive than his raw numbers.

NOT SO SLAMMIN' SAMMY

Cubs fans have been booing rightfielder **Sammy Sosa** *(left)*, now that his National League–record streak of 100-RBI seasons (nine) is in jeopardy (he had 56 at week's end) as well as his streak of six years with 40 homers (he needed 15 to tie **Babe Ruth**'s record of seven straight). What most baffles Cubs manager **Dusty Baker** is why Sosa can't hit lefthanded pitchers. Sosa entered this season a career .297 hitter against lefties with one homer every 14 at bats. But amid speculation that he's standing too far from the plate, Sosa has hit a meek .214 against lefthanders this season with only one homer in 70 at bats.

AN A-PLUS ADDITION

Can 21-year-old righthander **Jairo Garcia** *(right)* do for the A's what **Francisco Rodriguez** did at 20 for the 2002 Angels and **Dontrelle Willis** did at 21 for the '03 Marlins? Anaheim and Florida, the last two world champions, received critical boosts from the two hard-throwing rookies who arrived ahead of schedule. Last week Oakland called up Garcia, who began the year in Class A, to fortify their bullpen after he whiffed 91 batters in 53 innings. With a 96-mph fastball and a biting slurve, Garcia has K-Rod kind of stuff and similar poise. After his major league debut on Aug. 9, Garcia said, "It's the same thing, baseball. You need to throw strikes."

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

No team has been tougher to beat in one-run games this year than the Dodgers. Their 23–12 record in cliffhangers (.657) gives them a rare shot at winning 70% of such games for the season. Only 13 teams have played .700 baseball in one-run games since 1900 (excluding strike years), and all but two teams in that group (1908 Pirates and '13 Senators) reached the postseason.

Here are the only five teams in the last 40 years to play .700 ball in games decided by one run, and how they fared in the postseason.

Team	W-L	Pct.	Fared in Playoffs
2003 Giants	28–12	.700	Lost Division Series
1986 Red Sox	24–10	.706	Lost World Series
1980 Royals	29–12	.707	Lost World Series
1977 Royals	31–13	.705	Lost ALCS
1970 Orioles	40–15	.727	Won World Series

THREE STRIKES

1. After spending most of the last nine years in the minors, the Reds' **Ryan Freel** (.383 on-base percentage, at least 10 games started at five positions) has made an impression with his all-around performance, especially on defense. "Find where he is on the field," Astros first baseman **Jeff Bagwell** said, "and hit it somewhere else."
2. The Phillies are fading again under manager **Larry Bowa.** In his four seasons in Philly, the club is 187–165 (.531) before the All-Star break and 124–127 (.494) after it.
3. With another season lost because of injury—a torn right hamstring ended this one last week—**Ken Griffey Jr.** will have missed 348 of the Reds' 810 games in his five years with Cincinnati, or 43% of the games.

SKIPMILOS.COM (UPTON); JOHN CORDES/ICON SMI (MARTINEZ); JOHN BIEVER (SOSA); BRAD MANGIN (GARCIA)

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PLEASURE TO BURN

One Not-So-Shining Moment

by Rick Reilly

WHY DO YOU always have to be so negative? Why not mention what I did right?

For instance, I did not trip with the Olympic torch when I got my turn to carry it last Thursday outside Athens.

Also, I did not burn down the Acropolis. And did I flunk a drug test afterward? No!

But you have to pick nits. You have to bring up the fact that after five continents, 27 countries, 78 days, 11,500 torchbearers and 50,613 miles, it was *me* who put out the flame.

That's true. But Olympic officials never should have let me near the thing! So whose fault is it?

The trouble started when so many corporations got scared about the possibility of terrorism in Athens. NBC, for instance, gave its Olympic advertisers the option of being entertained in bomb-free Bermuda during the Games, and about half of them took the network up on it.

That opened up torchbearer slots for people who had no business being around fire. Like me.

I immediately started working on Greek phrases I might need, such as *Eimai edo! Kato apo ta baza!* (I'm here! Under the rubble!)

The morning of the run, I got my instructions with about 50 other torchbearers. "Do *not* hold the torch by the top—that part will be hot," the woman in charge actually said. "And do not go back the way the torch came. And if you want to buy your torch, it will be 360 Euros [$442], cash only."

O.K., so it's a sucker's game, but they got me. I now own an Olympic torch! I can't wait until I get it home. Imagine the possibilities. Donning the ol' uni and going backyard-to-backyard lighting neighbors' barbecues. Hanging around bars looking for people who have cigars to light. ("Oops! Sorry about your eyebrows, ma'am!")

And tell me it won't be handy if I have to lead a mob up to Dr. Frankenstein's house again.

Our group was taken by bus to the seaside suburb of Alimos. I watched as, one-by-one, the torchbearers were dropped off into throngs of happy Greeks, who rubbed the shoulders and soothed the nerves of each anxious runner for the 30 minutes until the torch came to their hero.

But when I was pushed out of the bus at my spot on the highway, there were no arms to fall into. In fact, nobody was there. Remember *North by Northwest*, when Cary Grant gets dropped off in the cornfield? This was lonelier than that.

If you have a comment for Rick Reilly, send it to reilly@siletters.com.

I sat on the embankment and waited. Not exactly as glamorous a deal as I'd pictured. Eventually, a fat old woman with three teeth and wearing a bikini top came up and spat out what sounded like a question in Greek.

To which I replied, "No, the swimsuit issue is closed for next year, but thanks for asking."

Finally, with 10 minutes to go, citizens started coming around. Old men. Kids. A truck driver. They were mesmerized by my torch, even unlit. I let them hold it, run with it, play with it. These people are going to be about $10 billion in the hole after this little 17-day party. It's the least I could do.

Minutes later, after I lit my torch from the flame of Athens housewife Anastasia Gregoriadou, I felt suddenly swept up in everything the modern Olympics stand for—bribery, drugs and bizarre mascots.

Actually, I was proud to be a tiny part of an amazing human chain, even in the stupid Richard Simmons shorts and headband they gave me. Proud I was passing along the same flame carried—for the first time—in Africa and South America, carried by Tom Cruise and Billy Mills and Miss World 2002 before me, and by Nikos Kaklamanakis to the Olympic cauldron itself not 36 hours after me.

> After 27 countries, 78 days, 11,500 torchbearers and 50,613 miles, it was me who put out the Olympic flame.

So what do you do when you're proud? You dance! You spin 360s! You run around trying to get cabbies to slow down long enough to show them the torch!

And what happens? All that flitting around puts the flame out!

Why? In Sydney a scuba diver carried the torch underwater. In Barcelona an archer shot it 35 yards. Yet my *little dance* put it out?

A very large Greek man came bounding out of a trailing van and grabbed me by the shoulders while a little guy with a Zippo relit my torch. "The torch serious!" the big man yelled into my forehead. "You not serious!"

Sorry, Avery Brundage.

I finished the rest of my 300-meter run more serious than Tom Ridge, handed off the flame to a Greek TV reporter and watched everybody peel away, leaving me alone again in a very stupid outfit.

Yes, I extinguished the Olympic flame. But I checked with IOC officials, and they said it does not necessarily mean the entire Games will have to be replayed.

Man, this thing's going to be *cool* at concerts. □

BILL FRAKES

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